

THE TASKS OF MODERN LINGUISTICS IN MODERN SOCIETIES

KARL M. HEIDT

AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN WORLD, THE DESIRE FOR BETTER LIVING, the dangers of overpopulation, the search for more food to feed more people, and even the trip to the universe and to the stars challenge science and human ingenuity, more than any other time in the history of mankind, the system of communication — products of ingenious inventions of Man — has reached a stage of technical refinement and perfection, the question may arise as to how far the science of language, or LINGUISTICS, is contributing and can contribute towards making people and nations “feel happy,” in a similar way as e.g. the technology of motorcars, the invention of space rockets, or the development of better and better television sets etc. can nowadays be considered as symbols of a nation’s progress and pride.

The importance of language in human society is evident. Without it, no communication seems conceivable. However, as strange as it seems, the value and the function of languages as integrating forces of modern societies seem not to have been sufficiently recognized by the science of language. Moreover, the mechanics of language, i.e. structure, morphology, phonology are as such even alien to many even educated people. . . . The average person in school will, all right, learn a lot of items about English or French, both world languages and very useful as *Lingua Franca* almost all over the world. But what about his own language, for the expression of deeper thinking, the search for understanding ideas in his own speech?

If I want to explain the tasks of Modern Linguistics in modern society and societies, I would like to acquaint you with the complexity of the problem of elaborating first on some of the important factors and facts which make up the background of the problem.

If we look at the political world map of today, we notice, as a result of yesterday’s history, many names of new nations which, to the ignorant, are often not even known by their proper names; not to talk about the people, their cultures and languages, which form the nucleus of these nations.

The process of the formation of new nations is certainly not completed yet, and the question will naturally arise: “. . . will it ever be completed. . . .?”

Let us now glance at the same world map. Instead of having political frontiers, we only see the cultural entities, such as the distribution of religions, the location of hunting and food-gathering societies, on other places, clusters of highly developed cultures and civilizations, alive or extinct. In this case, we shall notice that these boundaries, only in rare cases coincide with national frontiers of today.

Likewise, a world map revealing the distribution of the 3000 to 5000 existing languages of mankind will immediately prove an entirely different picture as compared with the placement of the nations of today.

And if again we make up a map of the world showing the distribution of mankind, with extremely dense areas in certain regions of the earth and on the other hand extremely scarce populations in other regions, we shall at once be confronted with a lot of other questions. What economic systems, educational facilities, communication systems etc. exist, and how do they function within the system of societies of different heritage? In other words, we want to know more about the social aspects of mankind in those various regions.

Thus we have at least four entirely different sub- and superimposed background facts:

- a) the distribution of Man
- b) the cultural groups and cultural concentrations
- c) the languages and their distribution
- d) the nations of today, as shaped by history.

Let me reflect a little longer on these various items:

a) The distribution of man, i.e. the fact that some areas are more densely populated than others, be it in urbanised or semi-urbanised societies is not necessarily the result of geographical and climatic interplaying factors. To explain this, we notice that many population clusters dwell in geographically and climatically unfavourable conditions, whilst on the other hand, fertile lands may be severely underpopulated. But, whatever reason there may be, we are particularly interested in the fact that we deal with people as a whole; people who have social problems and tackle these problems in different ways; people who communicate with each other, who speak and have to speak languages in order to be understood by fellow human beings.

But there is a difference when the language spoken between two persons is the genuine language of both, or whether they use an auxiliary language, because both persons have been educated in different languages, have different language backgrounds.

b) Our cultural map should actually be relief-shaped, similar to those maps which show geographical valleys, elevations and plains. It may not only show the present-day situation of cultures, but should strongly emphasize the historical aspects of cultural development. In

this case, the areas with cultural concentrations which had their origin deep in history and which continued up to the present day, would show the highest elevations. Other areas which were known to have had cultural concentrations in the past, but which became extinct (like the Inca or Maya or Mesopotamian cultures) would be of lower elevation, and may be superimposed by different structures which are placed on top, provided that there is a sort of continuity of populational existence on the same place.

c) The language map would show the distribution of present-day languages and language families by different colour spots. The picture would be quite interesting. In large areas, ilke America, or Australia, we would find one basic colour under which quite a number of different colour islands would be found representing the languages of the genuine populations and tribes. In a country like India, many different boundaries would reveal that there, a large number of different languages is spoken. And the thinly populated areas of Africa would need a spectrum of about 800 different colours and shades to account for the existing language situation.

d) Finally, we would lay on top of it all, a transparent map outlining the nations of today. At first glance we would have to discover that many nations of today are often — certainly not always — products of historical constructions of a past era which in many cases did not even last much longer than 100 years. This is especially the case with the nations outside Europe, America and Australia proper, like the nations of Asia and Africa, which make about 2/3rd of the world's population.

The present-day national borders are often and largely constructions of former foreign dominators. In the colonial epoch, these areas were not occupied from the point of view of populational or cultural considerations but by economic interest. The bargain took place either on the spot or at the conference table of European ministries and parliaments. Many borders of today have been made during the last or early present century.

However, the populations of the former colonial areas have developed, in a short period, such a strong consciousness of nationhood, that in most cases the borders had not changed remarkably, if at all, after independence has been achieved peacefully or forcefully. In how far are these problems relevant?

Of course, by comparing especially the last two maps, we shall notice that, as a result of historic developments, many formerly monolingual peoples have become bilingual, to say the least. The now independent nations have become integral parts of a worldwide family of nations. At the same time they are confronted with the problem that they must strengthen their political nationhood by their cultural and historical

identity. This again is easier in those cases where the present-day boundaries are largely based on ethnic facts with common cultural backgrounds of the population. There are many cases where this is not the case!

Many forces are at work to help establish or strengthen national identity on the basis of a common cultural heritage. But there are also forces which are opposing this. I just wish to mention a few opposing factors: e.g. the growth of population in a given area, which may be too rapid. In such cases, the family life, the usual and strongest source of cultural tradition, may become endangered. The head of the family is not able anymore to give adequate attention to all his successors, and gradual disintegration will take place. Another counter-force is what we generally call "progress," by which we mean industrialization, and as a result, uniformization. Extreme and excessive cultural borrowing is another factor. This often results in "cultural fatigue," and hence deculturation, disintegration of the traditional heritage, and loss of identity. In ideal cases, this may lead to a new styling of "identity," where old and new forms of civilization are amalgamated in harmony.

I often heard the complaint that, with the danger of a population explosion, the world is bound to become the "horror state of 1984," according to G. Orwell. However, viewing at the vast cultural-potential resources which lie in mankind and in the peoples of today, I do not believe in this pessimistic theory. One of the strongest agents to gain and to preserve the cultural identity of the peoples of the world, by which is meant the cultural heritage which needs to be productive also in the future, is language. Actually, not language by itself, but the languages of the peoples within the given societies of today.

The science of languages, commonly called Linguistics, is really the instrument which serves this purpose. However, linguistics as an autonomous science, has not really become aware of its potential — or has it?

What are the reasons for this suspicion? Will we find the answer to it if we investigate what linguistics really has achieved up to now.

The scientific study of language has only started in the last century if we disregard some outstanding analysis of particular languages in the remote past, like Panini's Grammar of the Sanskrit language, still accepted as an excellent, and most skillful example of language observation. With the sudden and rapidly increasing interest in the study of language, specific schools of language scholars were created, like e.g. The Cercle Linguistique de Prague, the school which gathered around Ferdinand de Saussure, who is known as one of the founders of modern linguistics (1857-1913), and the Cercle Linguistique de Copenhagen, just to name two.

With the discovery of the mechanics of sound systems in language, with the development of the sub-science of phonology, and subsequently

of morphology, structure, etc., more and more knowledge was added and is still being added to this science. However, already more than 30 years ago, a famous American linguist, Leonard Bloomfield, made an important statement: "...it (i.e. Linguistic Science) is only in its beginnings, the knowledge it has gained has not yet become part of our traditional education...." Now, thirty years later, it seems as though the situation has not remarkably changed. The time of language laboratories has suddenly come, more and more schools are equipped with fancy technical gadgets, in order to learn foreign languages "the easier way"; more and more methods are being developed to make the study of language easier. But on the other hand, the other sciences which require just as much brain work still have to be learned the traditional way. There are many brilliant linguists today who really gain more and more knowledge in their field. But this knowledge has not yet become part of our traditional education! We may rightly ask: WHY?

We have a lot of detailed knowledge on language and languages available. Strange enough, most linguists are extremely busy describing and investigating "strange" languages, but their own language remains again to be worked on by others. Apart from the rather clear-cut definitions of structural linguistics, descriptive linguistics, comparative linguistics, we hear of specialized branches of the same science, such as ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, psycholinguistics, metalinguistics, etc.

But above all, where does Linguistics actually belong? Is it an autonomous science or not? In certain fields there seems to be agreement, whilst others are still being disagreed on. But one thing seems to be generally accepted, language is inseparably connected with human culture. And the science which deals with, and studies, investigates, compares, and describes culture in all its aspects, is anthropology. It has to be concluded that linguistics, being a part of the science of the cultures of mankind, is—whether autonomous or not—a part of cultural anthropology. In what degree linguistics, for deeper studies, can afford to be separated from its mother science has to be judged separately from case to case. The study of language as well as the study of languages, spoken by different peoples, under different cultural aspects, as products of different developments of history, make it imperative for the linguist to avoid generalizations towards the theory of language, unless sufficient evidence is readily available. Let us not forget the fact that there is a great difference between language and languages, as there is a difference between culture and cultures. They are two different concepts. We are dealing with languages and cultures. Unfortunately, linguists do not often practically realize that at least some basic knowledge of anthropological theory is essential in order to avoid false conclusions. Likewise,

anthropologists do need to have a fairly good knowledge of the theory of language to achieve a more thorough understanding of cultural developments, acculturation processes, diffusion movements etc. The reality shows that the combination and collaboration of both mutually fertilising and supplementing sciences is far from being ideal. It is clear that each science tends to ramify when more and more knowledge is being added, but the basic ideal will prevail.

When, during the last century, anthropology emerged as a new academic science, the German Adolf Bastian, one of the initiators of this science, coined the idea called "Voelkergedanke" which meant that (a) cultures are not shaped by individuals within a given society but by inherent values which are common in that particular society, and that (b) the cultures as they are displayed today are largely the results of historical developments. It must be added that Adolf Bastian had travelled through practically all continents of the world and has based his ideas on his own observations by close contact with many different peoples and tribes.

On these premises, the science of cultural anthropology (or rather ethnology) is by itself, in its original methodology of research, a historical science. Only later on, when more knowledge was added about the mechanics of cultural development, the science split off into various separate methodological working units resulting into branch sciences like physical anthropology, social anthropology, cultural anthropology, functional anthropology, etc.

However, what Adolf Bastian had quoted almost 90 years back still applies today, maybe even more, as the pace of modern history has qualities like a bulldozer which sweeps everything flat, regardless of what is being destroyed under the working surface. Bastian said: "Was hier in wuthender Hast ausgetilgt wird, das sind der Menschheit geistige Guter, die uns gehören, uns und unseren Nachkommen, die wir diesen wenigstens zu bewahren die Pflicht haben, wenn wir sie etwa nicht selbst ausnutzen wollen oder können. . . ." ("That which here is being annihilated in outrageous haste, those are mankind's spiritual goods, which belong to us, as well as to our posteriors, for whom at least we have the duty to preserve them, if we cannot or do not want to utilise them ourselves. . .")

It thus becomes quite evident that the overall-science of anthropology, which includes linguistics, has the tasks:

- a) to investigate and study Man and his works. To gain more knowledge of the processes of cultural development, which reaches deep into the psyche of Man.
- b) to make this knowledge available to Man as a part, as a member of a given society, and not let the knowledge slumber in museums and libraries.

- c) as a further development of (b) to formulate, for educational purposes, the cultural-historical substance of the world's peoples within present-day societies and nations.

Great initiatives have been taken by many nation leaders to this effect: take for example the great Museum of bygone high cultures in Mexico, where general textbooks, for schools and colleges, raise the peoples' interest in their ancestors' achievements. This is a formidable example of how extinct cultures of the past (of the Maya and Aztecs) are being preserved, kept alive, and utilized as an "instrument" of nationhood. The awareness of belonging to the offspring of great creators of culture with a highly developed science and philosophy, has become a stronger integrating and identifying force of Mexican society than the fact that "the country is nice and attractive . . ." Other examples within the lines of these ideas presented are to be found in India, Indonesia, and Peru, just to quote a few.

It can however become disastrous, where in the course of revolutions, a complete break with the historical past, is being aimed at. Recent developments in China with her Red Guards give ample testimony.

It is not only the awareness of a great past which may or may not reach into present days, which may serve as a unifying agent or force or instrument of nationhood. More than ever before in history, the factor "language" has gained utmost importance in nation — and society-building, as well as in establishing and preserving socio-cultural identity and integrity. Today, it is not sufficient to have independent borders in geography, or to have a seat in the United Nations, or to have an independent currency system, and hence independent trade with the rest of the world.

Apart from these values, every nation and every society needs, to preserve its stability, a set of values which are an inalienable heritage of the given society. In such a case it really does not matter whether the society consists of the one or more ethnic groups. Every sensible government today will see that, in multi-ethnic societies, the common heritage becomes more important to the individual of the society than the ethnic-historical differences.

The creation of language awareness is an extremely difficult task. And to convert a former colonial language into a unifying national language is likewise not an easy undertaking. Under colonial language is meant the usually "easy" local language of the host's country, often simplified to an extreme degree of distortion, and its faculties reduced to deal with simple everyday necessities only. Examples of such pidginized *linguae francae* are the simple Hindustani in India, the Bazaar Malay in Indonesia and Malaya, the simple Swahili in East Africa and

Hausa in West Africa, the various forms of Pidgin English, the "simple" Tagalog in the Philippines. It must be observed that in each of the cases quoted the basic situation is different. In the case of Malay, e.g., the type spoken in Indonesia is much more developed by virtue of inside development long before the colonial rule ended. A relatively good language training by the Dutch, inner dynamics of the people and various other factors have favourably influenced the further development of the Bahasa Indonesia. In Malaya, the situation was different due to the fact that by a different attitude of the colonial masters, the genuine Malay language could not develop adequately. In East Africa, where Swahili has been a widespread lingua franca before the advent of the colonial powers, this language has remained much purer where the direct interest and influence of the colonial settlers was minimal. In those areas, like Kenya, where the British had clustered at certain spots of interest (such as Nairobi), the quality of the original language has extremely suffered and deteriorated. Now, of course, after independence had come, the language situation has become extremely difficult.

Very few countries are as lucky as France for having had a language-building body, like the "Academie Francaise" for more than 300 years now. Under such circumstances, where an Academy enjoys nationwide recognition and authority, a steady and gradual progress can be guaranteed. It is quite natural that the great masters of a given language, such as writers, poets, and also teachers and philologists, are attracted by such bodies once they become known in wide circles of society.

But what happens in a case where such bodies, like a Language Academy does exist, but where the number of nationwide recognized writers and language experts just do not exist yet? In such instances, there arises the danger that nonqualified or semi-qualified personalities take over. I here refer to those countries which have gained independence from colonial rule more or less recently, and which, before the advent of independence, have not had the chance yet to make the language problem a vital issue of forthcoming nationhood. . .

This is the point where linguistics, as an international science, can and has to appear on the scene. I often heard the complaint that this or that non-European language just has not got the basis to become a national language. Nasty critics contend that some new nations should better continue to use the language of the former, heterogenic rulers. This sort of talk gives testimony of quite a bit of ignorance, as it only shows that not enough thinking has been devoted to the question. Of course it is much easier for international partners in politics, economics, and culture, to continue relations in the hitherto used European based-lingua franca. It all of a sudden appears almost insurmountably difficult to use a lingua franca in all realms of life: not only in business

but also in technology, science, art, philosophy, university etc. Naturally, a lot of terms are lacking in the beginning, but the basic concepts of thinking, structural faculties do exist in all languages. And the growing process of vocabulary is just a matter of time and . . . education! The major reason, however, why a given language could not become as widely known among a given society lies in the fact that no proper way had been developed yet to teach the language by clear-cut and easily understandable formulations.

There are plenty of good linguists all over the world. There are also plenty of institutions where the science of language is being taught and studied, where languages are investigated, studied, formulated within given scientific patterns. Languages are really being studied from many angles to the effect that, — as I mentioned before — many separate branches within the study and theory of linguistics have been and are being exploited to add more and more knowledge to the general phenomenon of language.

When linguistics — apart from conventional philology — has become a separate science which investigate languages microscopically with a “man-from Mars-attitude” (this started actually only in the beginning of this present century), we acknowledged — through the above mentioned circles and schools — the new approach towards the formation of a new “Theory of Language”. As already mentioned before, the theories of phonology, phonemics, morphology, and structure, from various new viewpoints, became widely known among linguists. The study of hitherto unwritten languages and many unknown languages added an enormous amount of material to the already existing knowledge of language and languages.

In the United States of America, an all-over attack towards the study of language was enhanced by great personalities in that field like L. Bloomfield, F. Boas, E. Sapir and many others. The inter-relationship between language and culture was formulated in many ways, but the deeper the studies penetrated into the true nature of language, the more diversified these studies became. Today, we may hear highly specializing terms being used within the study of language, such as psycho-linguistics, socio-linguistics, anthropological linguistics, ethnolinguistics, meta-linguistics, etc. Each linguist, within one of the categories, follows certain patterns and aspects of the science which of course is also necessary for the overall benefit of academic knowledge.

My question, however, is: Can the conscience of science afford it, nowadays, to withhold any field of knowledge from being made useful for man and mankind? Atomic theory with its basic implications is formulated in such a way that it can be made understandable to young people already in upper primary schools (although this may be slightly,

but only slightly, exaggerated.) But what about the basic study and understanding of language, I mean, not of one certain language, but of the phenomenon of language? The study of language has not yet passed the stage of mechanical learning of words and antiquated rules of grammar, mostly within absolutely inadequate thinking patterns. However, among linguists and in linguistics, languages are usually formulated and described in terms of the actual findings. But very little has been done to simplify the formulations for general education purposes.

It has been only in recent years that linguistic theory under the guidance of qualified linguists has become an instrument of worldwide literacy campaigns under the sponsorship of the UNESCO and some other institutions. Many of hitherto unwritten languages have, with the help of linguistic theory, been converted into written languages. This, I believe, is a good start into the direction where linguistics should be made useful to mankind. However, in the case where languages already had a writing system, the contribution of linguistics for general educational purposes has been much less intensive.

In the present-day situation of linguistics, unfortunately no remarkable move has been attempted to contribute to the formation, the further development of already existing national language in order to make these languages fully qualified for their use in modern society, and to make them become a fully qualified symbol of nationhood. Very few studies have been made towards the understanding of the social functions of language, as well as of languages, in a given modern society. "The fact that some societies hang unto a language as a symbol of identity at any cost, while others blithely exchange one language for another, is an indication that the functional involvement of languages are not everywhere the same" (Hymes, *Horizons of Anthropology*). Apart from the social functions of language, linguistics must, in association with the cultural sciences, investigate the history, the folklore, the tales, stories, hitherto unwritten, like the Brothers Grimm have done, followed later-on by other scholars, in order to gain a picture of the intrinsic values of the people of the society concerned. The results of these investigations and studies should, by all means, in easy and understandable terms, be made known to all schoolgoing people.

Where classical languages, i.e. old forms of a given language exist, modern linguistics should help formulate them in such a way that schoolchildren of the upper levels can even study them.

Such historical symbols of a nation's identity will add much more to the factor of national pride than the knowledge of e.g. export rates, living standard, political history, or similar items of the country concerned. Good examples of this can be observed in India, where the study of Sanscrit is compulsory; or Indonesia, where Ancient Javanese, the lan-

guage of a proud cultural history, is taught in school, or in many European countries where Latin and sometimes Greek is taught in schools to convey a knowledge of historical-cultural focuses which have emanated impulses over widespread areas all over.

It is needless to say that all these tasks in our modern world cannot be left to one party to deal with. Linguistics as a science is waiting to be called for constructive assignments in our modern society. Educational institutions must become aware of the existing need and potential. The initiative must come from all sides, from the teachers as well as from the education ministries: not only to learn foreign languages, but to study their own languages. To develop them into a condition of equal value to other languages, and at the same time preserve local languages and dialects, cultures and lore, especially in multi-ethnic societies. Such efforts, carried out with wisdom, will contribute towards creating, establishing, preserving and promoting the idea of identity of any modern society.

Speech is the mirror of a person's personality. Likewise, language is the mirror of a society's personality, and therefore it deserves and needs all possible attention. And last, but not least, important world bodies, such as UNESCO, must become aware of these necessities in their plannings and expenditures. There is little use in "making" a lot of new words on the desks of Language Academies under the guidance of Government sponsorship, if the real spirit of the language-speaking society concerned is not fully recognized and has not been exhaustively studied. This kind of study is actually the job of a qualified linguist and sociologist.

The most valuable property of Man, his language, needs proper treatment. We have a common saying: every person is recognized and and judged by the way he dresses. It makes absolutely no difference whether his various pieces of clothes come from many different countries as long as the whole outfit matches. Likewise, with the language of a given society or nation, it really doesn't matter how much borrowing from other languages have taken place as long as the spirit as well as the identity of the society concerned is not distorted.

One more word about the question as to whether modern Linguistics should be engaged in forming an international language. In the past 80 years, about 20 or more attempts have been made to produce, on the desk, a language for world wide use. The deficiencies in their idealistic offerings are blatant. The results of such attempts are a few clubs whose members are proud to be able to converse with club-members in other countries. The amount of work and time to be devoted to learn an artificial language with no cultural background is always remarkable, but where the interest goes deeper in understanding the other's history and

culture, frustration seems inevitable. This is certainly not the task of modern linguistic science.

Adequate descriptive information about languages is a prerequisite for historical understanding. And history may, in every society, be considered the strongest basis upon which a nation's language reposes. Individual nations, like individual persons, have their specific power, characteristic temperament and particular history by which they as units distinguish themselves from other individual nations.

Those nations which possess an awareness of history and their own language, their writers, thinkers scientists, are really the happy ones. But there are many nations, young ones, who still are struggling to achieve what others have got already. Those nations need the help of modern linguistics to become fully aware of themselves. But modern linguistics should really become aware of the role it has to play in the modern world. There are great assignments ahead which are worthwhile to be handled with insight, wisdom and all energy available.

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