

Mediatization and Linguistic Change: Some Musings to Ponder

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Abstract

Language is subject to change according to the spirit of the age. Accordingly, the present period is one that is closely attuned to the new generation media. Today one could categorize television, internet and the mobile phone as the latest media. These constitute the ‘un-expendable’ amenities/essentials in day-to-day life these days. It could be seen that these media has undoubtedly a power to create a distinct language and culture within each society. This authority exuded by the new gen media is enhanced by the technological backdrop in which they are powered off. Even though technology and media has influenced the language and culture of mankind at all times, the influence of it in the present is unprecedented.

It is interesting that the language of written literature has given way to a specific kind of cyber literature. The internet has been able to digitalize even the orthodox art forms, giving them a different identity. Digital library gave birth to a novel model of dissemination of information. The introduction of ‘unicode font’ breaks through the notion that English is the only language hosted by the net. This font is a mixture of the technical language of the net with that of regional linguistic variations. The different language blogs also point to the vast options in expressing one’s experiences. The flexibility in linguistic use also has given way to

the introduction of the 'globish' language, which facilitates the most convenient use of English. This article intends to make an in-depth study of how the linguistic changes that have taken place in our society as a result of mediatization has affected us.

Keywords: Media, Language, Culture, Technology, Linguistic change.

Introduction

The variety of language used by an individual is called an idiolect. It reveals the culture and personality of that particular individual. On the basis of social stratifications, there can be differences in the variety of language used by people in a society. This language used by majority of people who reside in a society points out the culture of a sociolinguistic group. Thus one can, for sure, say that language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship. Certain culturally specific techniques in language are learned over many years, largely by observing and imitating. It may be true that, "the real world is, to a large extent, unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever so similar that they represent the same social reality" (Sapir 84). Language and culture are homologous mental realities.

Byran in his influential study *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education* posited that "a loaf of bread evokes a specific culture of objects in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one" (34). Our language displays our culture. Language is the epitome of our character, behaviour, personality and also our attitude to others. Buttjst in *Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching* observes that "Culture learning is actually a key factor in being able to use and master a foreign linguistic system" (22).

The relationship between man and the media is growing more intricate everyday. This is leading to a technology centered atmosphere being generated; closely related to the media. Even though technology and media has influenced the language and culture of mankind at all

times, the influence of it in the present is unprecedented. This authority exuded by the new gen media is enhanced by the technological backdrop in which they are powered off. It is interesting that the language of written literature has given way to a specific kind of cyber literature. The internet has been able to digitalize even the orthodox art forms, giving them a different identity. Digital library gave birth to a novel model of dissemination of information. The introduction of 'unicode font' breaks through the notion that English is the only language hosted by the net. This font is a mixture of the technical language of the net with that of regional linguistic variations. The different language blogs also point to the vast options in expressing one's experiences.

As Hinde observes in *The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication*, "It is not solely related to mass communication, but includes at the same time various other forms of mediated communication; for example, communication via the Internet, mobile phones and newer forms of 'intelligent' communication systems" (19) .

Conceptualizing 'mediatization' in the frame of 'mediatized worlds' means that present cultures and societies are mediatized. This is in the sense that media are constitutive for them and that their reality construction is highly moulded by various media. As Abercrombie suggests in his book *Social Media and Society*, "From 'unfriend' to 'selfie', social media is clearly having an impact on language" (5). Since the language which we use to communicate with each other is more informal and flexible than formal communication, the mixture of our informal ways of speaking with social media is a solid reason for the swift change in our language. For language is also susceptible to change, just like anything else. Thus emoticons, acronyms and hashtags have become popular icons of informal communication in our daily lives. These icons, which are trendy today are the contributions of the various social media websites.

New words and meanings

Facebook has played a great role in providing new meanings for common words such as ‘friend’, ‘like’, ‘status’, ‘wall’, ‘page’, and ‘profile’, ‘troll’, ‘sock puppet’ etc. The fact is that common man will not be able to cope up with all these changes in the vocabulary with which he is comfortable. If one is a lawyer grappling with the new geek speak, one may need to use up court time to have terms such as ‘rickrolling’ explained to him or her. But the truth is that, as Jensen observes, “social media is great for word nerds” (21). It has its own role in bringing about a revolution in the language of our communication. There are people who maintain that this revolutionary change in language is a good sign. On the other hand, there are people who undermine the social media’s role in changing the language and such language lovers think that it has ruined their language. But we cannot stand on either side. This “mediatized quick communication style that attracts youngsters has transformed our conversations from face-to-face instances to through-the-screen ones” (Dodd 124).

Social media quickly breaks down personal barriers. These little titbits open up a whole new world of conversational opportunities when we see our friends in person. Today people are rapidly connected with through the social media websites. The distances between people have been reduced by the booming new gen media, which is obviously a success in this world of rat race. People who do not have time to meet their friends or relatives due to their heavy and busy work schedule now get time to connect with them, thanks to whatsapp and twitter and all. With the prevalence of smart phones and popularity of texting, chances are one has been with someone who was there, but not quite there.

As Clyne points out in *Media, Society and Culture*, “Social media is definitely changing the way we communicate, but in many ways it's for the better as we expand our social circles and explore new horizons through our online connections” (90). Language always carries meanings and references beyond itself. As Carey maintains, “the meanings of

a particular language represent the culture of a particular social group” (53). Since there exists a connection between culture and language, it is quintessential to know the language of a particular social group to understand its culture.

Conclusion

A study of the New Gen media is of importance in the Indian national context. In this age, when India aims to be an economic power of stature, with definite leaps in Information Technology, New Generation Media Studies requires prominence not conceived before. Considering the condition in Kerala, it could be seen that there has been an explosion of media consumerism along with a revolution in media technology. The boom in electronic market around the globe makes even its smallest waves felt in the nook and corner of Kerala. Being a cultural ‘model’ of development (that permeates to all sections of the society), social media has become an indispensable feature in every house and hamlet in Kerala. In fact, even those without a hut possess a mobile in the state. With IT being part of the primary educational syllabus, Internet / Computer too is automatically becoming an essential element in all households today. Consequently studying about these new generation media is imperative in the present social context, in order to understand and regulate the life of the next generation.

It is the need of the hour to get accustomed with the changing situation of our lives and thus we have to cope up with the technological advancements through which we are passing through each day. And to be in tune with the new generation media is quite essential today. But we must take utmost attention in not allowing the social media to dominate us. In other words, we should not become the addicts of the new gen media. As Wadhwa points out in his online article titled *How Can We Make Technology Healthier for Humans?*, “in engaging with technology, we should actively and consciously lean toward the contexts and uses in which we find the technology behavior to be largely beneficial and satisfying”. All of

us should be aware of the positive and the negative sides of the social media. Our attitude towards the maintenance of social relations should not be solely governed by these media. We should find time to spend with our dear ones, outside the internet and the mobile phones. There has to be a line of distinction between the media world and the real world, which is necessary to keep up our social relations. Lets hope for a better future.

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