

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

The meaning of an utterance (sentence) does not depend entirely on its form; it also depends on its location in a setting. The meaning of what is said depends on who says it to whom, when, where, and with what effect. In other words, the context of situation in which an utterance is said is very important in deciding its overall meaning. The following sentence is interrogative in form but means a polite request in a dining hall situation:

'Can I have the salt, please?'

The following factors help us understand the meaning and use of language.

- | | |
|---|---|
| (a) Nature of Participants | (b) Nature of Participation |
| (c) Role of Participants | (d) Function of speech events |
| (e) Mode or medium | (f) Kind of discourse |
| (g) Topic of discourse | (h) Physical setting |
| (i) Socio-cultural situation | (j) The real world knowledge or beliefs the participants bring to a discourse |
| (k) The speaker's desire or lack of it to commit himself or herself on a position | |
| (l) A combination of all the factors mentioned above. | |

A speaker's competence or ability should include linguistic abilities such as the ability to construct and understand sentences never heard or uttered before in his life, the ability to accept as grammatical or reject as ungrammatical any utterance, quite apart from the ability to say whether it is a sensible utterance or not, and ability to interpret sentences in more than one way in the presence of ambiguity.

An effective user of a language needs two types of ability - the ability to produce grammatically well-formed sentences and also the ability to ~~produce~~ select and use sentences appropriately keeping in view the demands of topic, setting and addresser-addressee relationship. Communicative competence includes a speaker's linguistic competence; they are closely related to each other and develop side by side.

Language is a system of communication used by people living in a society. There is very close relationship between society and language. This relationship may be analysed in terms of regional variations, such as settlement patterns and dialect distributions.

Our daily life takes us through a series of activities involving the use of language. We use several registers, styles, the spoken and written mode, depending on the situation. So language must be studied as a human phenomenon and not just as a linguistic phenomenon unrelated to life and society. This means we should go beyond the sentence and study discourses, transactions and exchanges and study the relations between language use and types of situations. We should not only study the linguistic performance but also the illocutionary force of sentences. It means what the sentences are designed to do in a given setting, i.e. how we do things with words.