

# Language as Value

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The paper discusses the following postulates: (1) The value-oriented existence of language manifests itself in the pragmatic perception of its users; (2) Language is the product of a value-oriented creative activity; (3) The key component of the axiological competence is an evaluation standard serving as an interpretative construct for the evaluation of linguistic means; (4) Preferences reflecting the evaluation do not always coincide with the preferences connected with the intuitive evaluation of linguistic means; (5) Differences in these evaluations and the differences in pragmatic perception of linguistic structures result in axiological differences. The paper also deals with the objectivity of the value of expressive means of a literary language and with the objectively justified preferences.

**Key words:** pragmatic perception of language, value-oriented existence of language, axiological concept, evaluation standard, intuitive and reflexive evaluation

## 1. Introduction

The linguistic works of Professor J. Horecký, especially those discussing the standard language, prove how deeply he understood the value of language. This emphasis appears as a natural element of knowledge flowing from his ingenious analyses and thoughts. The following text is deeply inspired by his unique linguistic thinking.

It is often noted, especially in connection with language culture and language education, that language is value. Because of this, the relevance and importance of building one's relationship to language in general and to the standard language in particular is emphasized. The statement that "Language is value" tends to function as an appeal to the users of language to deal with it in harmony with its roles both in the forming and maturing of certain ethics and in the contemporary material and spiritual life of the society. However, the concept of value in relationship to language and the implications of such a concept are not given the attention of analysis. This article belongs among those which focus on the axiological aspect of language, with the intention of gradually developing of the axiological theory of language. Philosophical analyses of the concept of value as well as meta-ethical analyses of the evaluative terms form the background of these studies.

The concepts found in this article have been introduced to some extent by the author in his earlier analyses and contemplations; therefore, the reader already familiar with the study of the axiological aspect of language may find references to some of the following concepts in previous works of the author. This article is an account of the axiological aspect of language, specifically of language both as value and as the object of evaluation. It is, with this goal in mind, divided into the following sections: (1) the social existence of language; (2) language in the axiological view; (3) language as the product of the value-creating activity; (4) the user of language as the evaluating subject; (5) the language society as the evaluating subject; (6) intuitive and reflexive evaluation; and (7) axiological differences. The conclusion raises relevant questions for additional research. The following terms are to be considered as the supporting elements of this essay: pragmatic language reception, evaluative existence of language, axiological understanding of language, metalinguistic axiological competency,

axiological concept, ethno-communication analogy, language norm, evaluating standard, intuitive and reflexive evaluation, 'language logic', 'consistent rational logic', and objectivity of value.

## **2. Social existence of language**

As with other objects, we can approach language with the intention of grasping it in either its natural or its social existence. With the former, the researcher focuses remains on the theoretical description of language without taking into consideration its social nature; with the latter, research is focused on understanding language as an 'intra-vital' object, i.e., an object playing a role in the life of an individual and society. Most of the classical structuralist schools defined their research area by the 'natural' approach and, as a result, developed the fundamental knowledge of language structure. In contrast, the Prague School did not limit itself to this approach as its members explicitly stated in their opening thesis on the functionality or the means of language.

The social existence of language is manifested in the functional aspect of language. Grasping language in its social existence means understanding its social functionality. When studying language's social existence, the basic set of questions involves the functional potential of language and the functional motivation and the processes of its structure. The questions concerning language functions are those that target the question of the meaning of language. Since human beings acquire language with its functions, the meaningfulness of language is fixed in their minds. Moreover, meaningfulness concerns the fact that language is one of the components in the structure of human activities that enables humans to achieve their aims.

These aims can be reached only within interactions with other members of the same language society, which fact emphasizes their being socially conditioned. If we characterise the approach towards language from the point of view of its users as the pragmatic reception of language, it follows that the social existence of language is the function of its pragmatic reception. Even more explicitly, the social existence of language is dependent upon its being perceived through the lens of its place in the structure of activities of a language society's members. This perception occurs in the process of the interactions of its users. If we then correlate the already mentioned key terms, namely the social existence of language (social function), the meaning of language (meaningfulness), and the pragmatic reception of language, the following picture emerges: the social existence of language correlates with its pragmatic reception, in which the social functionality of language (its function) is reflected in its meaning (meaningfulness) and in which, at the same time, the meaning of language is described by its social functionality.

## **3. An axiological view of language**

The term pragmatic reception refers to the intuitive perception of language by its bearers in everyday use. It is perception from the point of view of the meaning of language that its users have. This point of view is defined by the needs, interests (wishes, imaginations, and so forth) and objectives of the language users in their daily interactions. The statement that a language

has a certain meaning for its users suggests that using languages satisfies certain needs and that certain interests are asserted and certain objectives are reached through its use. By looking at language from the standpoint of the needs, interests and aims of an active subject, observers are transferred into the world of values. From this viewpoint, the language presents itself as a value, since “by the term value we express the characteristic of the relationship of the objective reality to the subject, to its need, interests and activity” (Černík, Farkašová and Vicensík, 1986: 310).

The relationship between the meaningfulness of language and its being a value is found in the fact that the meaningfulness of language is a condition of its having value. In its pragmatic reception, language presents itself in its axiological existence. Therefore, the pragmatic reception of language relates to the axiological perception of language. The axiological point of view includes an evaluative approach of the subject. This means that when we speak of an axiological standpoint, we claim that we look at language in its axiological existence and that we look at it as evaluating subjects.

The epistemological contemplation of language is a counterpart of the axiological viewpoint. While with epistemological contemplation a language's elements and structure are seen as identified (and identifiable) linguistic entities, with axiological contemplation they are seen to be entities of a certain meaning, fulfilling certain standards (or ideals) of language entities to some specified degree. Axiological examination of language entities not only involves contemplation from the point of view of those questions which ask what the language is for its users, but also of those which ask if the language elements and structures are what they should be (according to what user wants). In other words, the contemplation involves both the specification of the role of language in the life of its users with regard to their needs, interests and objectives and, concomitantly, a confrontation between the states in which language entities are and states in which language entities should be.

The concept of the role of language and its state in the ‘should be’ mode is based on those needs, interests and objectives of language users which originate in and are defined by three different sources. The needs, interests and objectives of a human being as (a) a member of a distinctive species are defined by his cognitive and emotional characteristics, (b) as a social being are defined by his being dependent on interaction with others of his species, and (c) as an ethnically integrated individual are defined by his instinct for ethnic solidarity. It is in relationship to these three areas that language manifests itself as a value. The measure of language features, on the basis of which the language optimally satisfies the already mentioned needs and interests of its bearers and serves as the optimal, i.e., most desirable under the circumstances, assertion of their objectives, can be seen in the concept of language in ‘should be’ mode.

Therefore, it is the state of language in the ‘should be’ mode which is described by the optimal measure of features, enabling language to fulfil various functions. These functions, the cognitive and emotional (including aesthetic), the communicative, and the ethno-identifying, correlate with the specifically determined needs, interests and objectives of the language's users.

In connection with the aesthetic function/value of language, we must note, however, that a philosophical concept exists asserting that there are values with no connection to needs. The aesthetic value is usually connected with Kant's ‘disinterested pleasure’ (*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*), and is considered to be an absolute value (Reiner, 1965). However,

psychology (Linhart at al., 1987: 428) does include, among the secondary needs of a human being, the aesthetic.

#### **4. Language as a product of a value-creating activity**

Language is a product of value-creating activity by generations of human beings, motivated by their needs, interests and objectives. Therefore can itself be viewed as one of the examples of value-creating activities. One of the distinctive features of language-creating activity is the fact that it is realised through speech-creating activities, which, under normal circumstances, do not include an intentional component related to the language system. It is well known that the changes of natural language (those not conditioned by socio-linguistic factors) are motivated locally. This means that the changes occur as a part of the process of removing marked phenomena that the speakers meet in a specific speech situation, so that the change of a given type of phenomenon is gradual. Such changes are not the results of any intentional, planned change in language, but only of the process either of preferring an unmarked phenomenon or of 'evading' a marked element.

At this juncture, it might be very useful to be mindful of the question regarding what type of phenomenon language represents. 'The phenomenon of the third type' would be the proper answer, because, even if it is marked by the fact that it is the product of human activity, this activity is unintentional, unplanned and usually not realised (comp. Keller, 1989). Phenomena of this kind have also another typical feature: they are influenced by the 'the invisible hand', to use a term taken from political economics. The effect lies in the fact that certain accompanying features may appear or be strengthened, which are unintended by the agents. This epiphenomenon may result in forming a structure which originally was not in the visual field of the activity's originator. Language, as one of the examples of the 'phenomenon of the third type', can also be affected in this way.

When we speak of language as a product of a value-creating activity, the already mentioned circumstances must be taken into consideration. It is a product which suits a given language society in spite of the previously mentioned ephiphenomenon. Even if the forming of language is not intentional and other accompanying effects of speech activity take place in the process, it cannot be said, on any level of development of a language, that its value has decreased or that it does not relate to the needs, interests and objectives of the language society's members. It must be understood that language has developed and been formed from the very beginning as 'a phenomenon of the third type' by means of speech activity, whose accompanying processes include 'the invisible hand' effect. Moreover, its creators and users have gained experience, according to which this way of forming and developing is found to be both natural and suitable.

#### **5. The user of language as the evaluating subject**

We have already mentioned that language is acquired with its functions and, thus, that the meaningfulness of language is fixed in the mind of its users. Their evaluative ability (axiological competence) is applied in the process of grasping the language and its meaning. Axiological competence is specified in relationship to language as meta-linguistic axiological

competence, which encompasses both the ability of users to evaluate speech and language acts and their readiness for preferring certain elements and structures to other elements and structures. In this regard, the evaluation implies the preference.

It is on the basis of their meta-linguistic axiological competence that the users regulate their language-creating activity, so that the structures which fulfil the criteria included in this competence enter the language. How is this competence created? How does the user of language become an evaluating subject? Meta-linguistic axiological competence is created in the process of integrating a child into the communication process. In addition to the adopting of language structures, 'acceptance' adaptation takes place, so that the child accepts the adopted language as a well-trying means of communication. The child accepts it as a medium that serves him as well as it has to those from whom the child adopts it. Since the adopted language meets the needs, interests and objectives of the child, the child experiences it as a 'good' language.

Two additional matters must be noted here. The first one concerns the phenomenon which we name ethno-communicational analogy. This term reflects the fact that the one adopting the language learns to use the language in the same way, with the same meaning (analogically), as those who pass the language on to him. The analogical usage of language is in harmony, which is the second matter, with the fact that the already mentioned adaptation is active, meaning that the adopter of language learns to use the means of language in harmony with his own intentions. These two matters are crucial for the axiological characterization of the language user. They are also crucial in the process of stabilisation of the basic evaluative criteria: the criterion of functionality and the criterion of system appropriateness.

## **6. The language society as the evaluating subject**

Philosophers answer the question concerning what type of reality is represented by values by stating that abstract entities are characterized by the validity that they are considered to have. This means that a particular society or all the people in it accept them as generally valid, as something binding, or as something worthy of effort. The values are a reality in a social world, as they are conventionalised, institutionalised entities, which are, under certain circumstances, connected with specified sanctions, and are accepted as binding (comp. Lenk, 1994, p. 179). As a result, it is clear that social values are connected with norms. The language norm is bound to language as value and exists within the area of values. The validity of language as value and as an area of values is conditioned by the language norm.

The user of language as the evaluating subject is integrated into the language society by means of the language norm. The norm consists of the common needs, interests and objectives of the users in connection with the language, all of which serve as unifying elements. The language norm is the manifestation of the standardized concept of the characteristics of the language's means and of their usage. It is set as a reference point on the evaluation scale, which serves as a measuring instrument of the evaluation in relationship to the language's means. This evaluation standard is the central component of the axiological concept, serving both as the basis for meta-linguistic axiological competence and as an interpretation construct in the process of evaluating language acts. What is interpreted as 'meeting the standard' is evaluated as 'good'.

The evaluation of language acts is certainly not limited to the binary opposition ‘+good:–good’. The evaluation scale includes even subtler differentiations, which occur in relation to appropriate phenomena (especially with regard to the usage of language means in certain communicational conditions). However, the reference point is the basic index of the evaluation scale. It is the basis for and the support of the evaluation, which is the result of the fact that there is a fixed, stereotyped notion of language structures in the ‘should be’ mode. The evaluating, interpretive stereotype which allows given language structures to be compared to an evaluative standard (that is, the stereotype state ‘should be’) is automatically found in communication and is one of the leading agents of language activity. It controls the production and reproduction of language structures by members of a language society.

## 7. Intuitive and reflexive evaluation

Just as we distinguish between language awareness and consciousness (language sense and language intuition), in the same way we must distinguish between reflexive and intuitive meta-linguistic axiological competence. Intuitive evaluation is a part of the communicational dealing with language, while reflexive evaluation is connected with contemplating the language either outside its normal usage or only occasionally within the language. The difference between the two can be illustrated by the following case. A linguistically uneducated user, regarding a specific language form which he uses without hesitation as a ‘good’ one in everyday communication, thinks about it occasionally and comes to the conclusion that he should have used a different form (for example, he prefers the genitive form *Sod Soni* ‘from Sonya’, but, after consideration, realises the correct paradigm and the correct form *od Sone*). This difference becomes even more visible if we take into consideration theoretical (linguistically based) meta-linguistic axiological competence (for example, if on the basis of linguistic analysis the preposition *pre* ‘for’ is required in cases where the preposition *kvôli* ‘because of’ is used in everyday communication). The preferences resulting from reflexive evaluation, therefore, do not always correspond with the preferences resulting from intuitive evaluation of language means.

Possible differences will not be found surprising, since the same phenomenon has already been described in relation to unilateral and bilateral understanding of a language act. The difference between the two understandings has been drawn from the difference between communicational and extra-communicational uses of language (comp. Král, 1974). In the current context, this is the difference between communicational (intuitive) and extracommunicational (reflexive) axiological dealing with language. The possible difference of preferences, resulting from the evaluation within normal language communication and outside it, is rooted in the difference between ‘language logic’, which is at work in normal, natural communication and which marks a real language system, and ‘consistent rational logic’, which is at work when thinking in different contexts. To illustrate this we can use the phrase *zemiakové hranolky* (standard translation ‘potato chips’) which is preferred in everyday communication, having its basis in ‘language logic’, while the required form *zemiakové hranolčeky* (literal translation ‘small chips made of potato’) is a result of ‘consistent rational logic’. Respecting for language logic, then, means asserting the position of empirical realism whose importance has increased in the cognitive sciences, while maintaining the ‘consistent rational logic’ means maintaining the position of objectivism.

## 8. Axiological differences

A common empirical piece of knowledge concerning one entity's being assigned different values is valid also in relation to language. Possible differences result not only from possible differentiation of the pragmatic reception of language structures by members of the language society, but also from possible differences between their intuitive and reflexive evaluation. Possible axiological differences become even more significant in relation to standard language, its codification, the language critique, and the theory and reality of the language culture. In this regard, the issue of axiological contemplation of standard language and its usage can be illustrative.

It has already been mentioned that the validity of language as value and the area of values are both conditioned by the language norm. The norm reflects the common needs, interests and objectives of members of language society; therefore, it is accepted as a binding evaluative criterion. The norm of standard language, however, is under pressure from language *custom* and at the same time 'under the inspection' of prescriptive linguistics. It is, in fact, within the areas of language custom and prescriptive linguistic activity that the already mentioned possible axiological differences can be seen, causing discrepancies in the norm, in codification and in the language culture itself.

The origin of this differentiation is also important. Language custom is created through the process of the conventionalization of repeatedly occurring language structures in communication, which are controlled by users' intuitive meta-linguistic axiological competence. The elements of language communication that do not pass through the coordination filter of the intuitive meta-linguistic axiological competence of the members of a language society will not become customary. A common language reality demonstrates that there is a natural mechanism of 'customisation' of a used element, which is based on the intuitive consensus of the majority of custom bearers. The elements not entering the language custom are either those which are rejected by the majority of users' intuitive meta-linguistic axiological competence because they do not meet their common needs, interests and objectives, or those which, while found acceptable on basis of this competence, do not spread in usage even though they are evaluated as 'good' for rarely used (untypical, specific, unique) expressions.

The first type of elements proves that there are members in the language society whose intuitive meta-linguistic axiological competence does not reach the level of competence which reflects the needs, interests and objectives of the language society as a whole. In this case we can say that their sense of objective needs, interests and goals in relation to language (that is, for the objective value of language) is not developed enough. In other words, their pragmatic perception of language does not reach the level of the customary standard.

It is well known that not everything found in customary language is also codified, since it is the language norm that is recorded by the codification. The difference can be seen when the norm-creating social base is specified more narrowly than the body of custom creators and when the reflexive meta-linguistic axiological competence is also a part of the process of defining norm elements. On the basis of this competence, the codification limits the language norm change in relation to the custom. The difference between the intuitive and reflexive evaluation is eliminated in the codified norm by preferring the results of reflexive evaluation. One of the characteristics of the identification of the standard language norm is

consciousness, which is explained by the status of standard language among the forms of the national language. It is believed that reflexive evaluation supports the reinforcement of such a norm which optimally reveals the society's needs, interests and objectives in relation to the standard language.

The theoretically grounded meta-linguistic axiological competence of prescriptive linguists guarantees that the standard norm expresses the truly objective needs of a language society. While reflexive evaluation leads to preferring language structures that do not contradict the 'consistent rational logic', the intuitive evaluation includes preferences in accordance with 'language logic'. Moreover, one can find an implied concept of 'standardizing' of the natural axiological contemplation of language, that is to say an optimal involvement of the reflexive evaluation in standard language usage, within the framework of prescriptive linguistics.

## **9. Conclusion**

The following questions, ideas, and concepts serve to focus attention on the fundamental questions which affect the axiological aspect of standard language and which require further research and theoretical clarification. The key issues are the objectivity of the value of the means of standard language, the related correctness of the evaluation of those means, and the objectivity of justified preferences. The value of standard language is defined by the needs, interests and objectives of the given language society under given conditions of social interaction. This results in the facts that the objectivity of value is defined by the objective needs, interests and goals of the specific language society and that only such evaluation is correct to which an objective evaluation criterion has been applied. The cases where a tension can be found between the codifier of the standard norm (or the language critique) and a typical user of standard language (the bearer of the customary standard) demonstrate the practical need for analysis of the axiological objectivity of standard language. Given these ideas, the following questions still require examination and research:

1. Does the already mentioned tension mean that a typical user of a standard language is not able to realise consistently his objective needs, interests and goals in relation to his language? Is his sense for the objective value of standard language imperfect? How is this sense created and refined?
2. What is the proportion of the intuitive and reflexive evaluation needed to retain the standard language in such a state that it reflects the objective needs, interests and goals of the language society? When can one speak of the optimal measure of influence of theoretical reflexive evaluation on the retaining of such state?
3. What mechanism governs the working of the standard language and the changes within it regarding the individual differences of meta-linguistic axiological competencies of the members of the language society? How is the norm of standard language created and retained as an objective measurement of its means?

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