NEW MEDIA AND ENTROPIC LANGUAGE

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Abstract
This paper attempts to deal with the issue of redundancy and entropy – the uncertainty in communication—with reference to the new media.The novel character of communication induced by the new media includes the preciseness, forced brevity and the unpredictability. The paper attempts to raise questions on whether and how this newness can affect ways of communication or language in general.

Introduction

Communication is a process to increase commonality among its participants and for this commonality to occur, the process requires some common elements among the participants. These common components include language, social system or culture. Among these, common language is an important component, which needs to be present among participants especially in written and verbal communication. And as language is a system that uses some symbols according to specified rules, the commonality can be attained when both the sender and receiver agree on those symbols. The terms of agreement among the users of a language keep on changing. Other than the users and their socio- cultural system who are always the agents of change in usage of language, the media seems to be an important element that is bringing the change. The new media seems to have brought drastic changes in the use of English by doing away with the concept of 'redundancy' in the use of English. Now, there is use of minimum letters, the letters one need to communicate in written communication.

Communication

Communication is generally defined as a process to increase commonality among the participants in the process. The word 'communication' is derived from the Latin word 'communis' that means to share or to make common. Hence, communication is a continuous act that aims at increasing commonality among the participants.

The process has sender, message, channel, receiver and response as its main ingredients. The five components operate continuously in the process of communication with a purpose. The process fulfills some purpose and the purpose is to get accustomed to the environment in which a person lives. The environment includes the natural environment as well as the society or the groups of the people in which a person exists.

David Berlo (1960) says that man communicates to influence - to affect with intent. He says, "Our basic purpose (of communication) is to reduce the probability that we are solely a target of external forces, and increase the probability that we exert force ourselves. Our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent, to affect others, our physical environment, and ourselves, to become a determining agent, to have a vote in how things are." (Berlo, 1960, 11)

Leaving aside the physical environment, the communicators need to influence their counterparts. Thus, to maximize the influence, one needs to influence them. Language is a code that helps a person to put his/her thoughts, ideas into symbols that the other person can understand. The more the participants agree on these symbols, more efficient and effective the communication would be. Hence, participants keep on bringing changes in the usage of these symbols and most of the time participants change these symbols to make their use easier. Infact, codes reflect social stratification of society. Language, which women uses often differ from men, the higher economic class uses language, which most of the time varies from the language used by lower economic class.

Other than the users and their socio- cultural system, the media, who always act as the agent of change in usage of language, seems to be an important element that is bringing the change.

Language

Language is a symbol system based on pure or arbitrary conventions…infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers. (Robin, 1980)

Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

The two definitions succinctly include all the features of a language. First and foremost, language is a symbol-based system that assigns significant symbols to meanings. Significant symbols are those symbols that produce similar responses in more than one person. These symbols are not based on reason but are in use because a large group of people has accepted them. They are used out of convention. Otherwise, this is no correspondence between the symbol and word used for it. For instance, why fan is called fan and not man, why it won't be spelled as naf but as fan only.

It also has a syntax, which provides a structure to these symbols. Syntax has rules according to which these symbols are spoken or written so that these can be understood.

Another important feature of language is that it is dynamic. It is ever evolving and gets modified with time. New words keep on getting added to the usage of a language while some words become archaic with the evolution of it. Even the way, they are spelled remain open to change. The change comes in owing to changing needs of speakers and these changes may be due to socio-cultural system or might be due to medium.

Both the features of being a symbol based system and being dynamic, centers around the user of the language. The foundation and changes come in the language owing to the needs and requirements of users.

Language and communication

Language is an important component of message-formulation in the process of communication. The message is written or spoken in a code which should be common among the participants in communication and language is one of the codes.

In Source-Message-Channel-Receiver Model (S-M-C-R) of communication formulated by David Berlo, language as a code is among one of the three elements that constitute message. The other elements are content and treatment. Berlo (1960) defines code as any group of symbols that can be structured in a way that is meaningful to some person. And language is a system that can be understood by its users.

Communication, with the help of language, has enabled man to develop and discover new things, and also to know about their past as the information and knowledge of one generation has been transmitted to another with its help only. This is one of the most important factors which have made man to progress in life and to make discoveries and inventions which help in making his life easier and comfortable. Without communication in identifiable codes, the human being would have been without the treasure of past to face the unpredictable future.

Language and Media

Language and medium directly affects each other. Language used in a medium depends upon the users of the medium, the environment in which the medium is used, the aim of the medium and the components of the medium.

Marshall McLuhan gave the concept of 'medium is the message', which emphasized the importance of a medium. 'Message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs (McLuhan, 1964). Hence, he related the change in medium to change in human affairs.

The language of print media has always remained formal as the medium primarily aims to inform and educate. The environment (i.e. morning) or the settings (i.e. libraries) also demands seriousness in its code. Policy makers have also remained one of its important readers dictating the code to be somewhat formal. Television is usually associated with relaxation and entertainment of its viewers; therefore, the language used is also soothing for ear. Usage of easy words and short sentences enlivens the screen.

Print media and electronic media (i.e. television) were media of mass communication. The two media seemed to have brought fewer changes in the use of language as the negotiation on the use of symbols was on larger scale and agreement needed time.

But the advent of new media which largely affects inter-personal communication and group communication seems to have brought drastic changes in the use of English. New media includes mobile phones, computer, social networking sites, e-mails, etc.

Speed and compactness, which are the salient features of new media, are clearly being seen in its language. Minimum letters, compact words and short sentences are being used. There is no place of redundancy at all. There are no silent letters, there are no pairs, it's just what you need to understand the message. Redundant letters have been dumped altogether. There is no redundancy, there is entropy everywhere.

C E Shannon, American mathematician who gave the mathematical model of communication with Warren Weaver introduced the concept of entropy in communication. He defined entropy as the uncertainty in the message.

Berlo (1960) explains the two words, entropy and redundancy, in his book *The Process of Communication.* He says that in Physics, entropy is defined as an uncertainty. And a human being tries to reduce the prevalence of this concept in his life by bringing in structures. The same structures are imposed by users of language in the usage of language so that uncertainty gets reduced in language. Redundancy, on the other hand, is defined as repetition or reiteration. Sometimes, it is used for emphasis while sometimes for assigning structure to sentences or words. But redundancy is not undesirable in language. It is as important as entropy. Redundancy brings in greater understanding or familiarity. It improves the effectiveness of the communication by bringing in familiar elements, making it easier for the receiver to grasp the message. (202)

But redundancy, these days has been done away with in the use of language. For instance, in telephonic conversation, the word 'hello' was essential to begin the conversation, but now the word is defunct with the use of mobile phone as most of the times the receiver already knows who the caller (sender) is. However, what this brings to light is that the redundancy in language is being given up but the conversation or the participants are contributing to the redundancy and closeness as the new media is being used for interpersonal communication more. And the participants in the interpersonal communication tend to be same when the intimate mediums like

mobile phones are being used by people. People tend to talk to same people whom they know on their mobile phones even when they go to new places. (Fortunati, 2002)

Similarly, the issues also tend to be same when the participants are same as Fortunati says "…also in terms of just the communicative aspect, always speaking over the mobile phone with one's own intimate circle of persons, instead of conversing with people met anywhere, outside home, implies remaining closed inside a rigid and inert kind of discourse, because one tends to say the same things, to repeat the same procedures in conversation, and so on."

The character of new media is dictating the concept of conciseness of message. The Short Message Service of mobile phone allows the user to write only 160 characters per message. Space between two words is also counted as a character. Twitter, a popular social networking gives the limit of 140 characters to its users for expressing their thought in a message.

The space which used to be precious in a mass medium like newspaper has become all the more important in new personal media like mobile phones and also media like Twitter which infact invites the user to explore the little space as it says on its website, "…don't let the small size fool you—you can discover a lot in a little space."

Even the environment in which the medium is used, also dictates the use of language. The mobile phone is also being used in classroom where the user has to write the message in few seconds, hence, the message need to be as short as possible. The Twitter has a fan following culture which gets hundreds of responses within few hours; hence time is a limitation here.

Language of new media is here to change the concept of entropy and redundancy in communication. The point of discussion, here, is that whether the users would be able to take so much of unpredictability or newness in the message every time. Would not the messages be lost in all newness as the receivers would not find any reference point to hold on to?

Would the kind of access to information, the users have today through television, mobile phones, internet, be bearable when even the code used would be new with no familiarity and predictability?

As the new media is using the writing skill of communication the most (in mobile phones, SMS is the most used feature), the users are affecting the changes in the way they write language.

The use of language of inter-personal communication and group communication has entered the formal communication also as in the answer scripts of the school/college students. The education boards of various countries have started thinking of ways to bring back students to the original usage of English.

The changes in language are nothing new; changes have always been made and accepted according to the needs of the users. Being modifiable and extendable are the features of a language. The English language which Shakespeare used to write is no more being used today. But the agent of change is the question here. Should media be so important that it brings such changes in the usage of language? Is media affecting the changes for the first time and would these be accepted?

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