

Example of different understanding of language and communication - conventional v...

[Education](#), [Discipline](#)



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Introduction

Language pertains to the ability, mostly of humans, to acquire, and learn the use of complex systems of communication. Any specific mechanism or use of communication can be considered as an example of language. Contrary to common public perception, the study of languages is not called language but rather linguistics. The objective of this paper is to discuss language in general, and then discuss language from a conventional point of view, and then compare this point of view to that of critical hermeneutics.

Conventional Language Perspective

There are a lot of languages that exist today. According to recent estimates, the total number of languages today range from 6, 000 to over 7, 000 . The variation in estimates is likely caused by different distinction and operational definitions between dialects and languages. Certainly, dialects and languages are not the same thing.

Humans are likely to have started establishing complex systems of

communications since the prehistoric times when one of the primary sources of food for survival was hunting. Hunting during those times were usually done in groups, especially when they were dealing with a group of preys or one that was larger than usual. Surely, prehistoric humans' group hunting sessions would not have been successful without any system of communication such as language. There are three qualities that make human language—although human languages number in thousands, unique: productivity, recursivity, and displacement.

Productivity in linguistics refers to the degree to which a native speaker of a particular language uses a particular grammatical process to form words .

Recursion in linguistics refers to the process of repeating words or items in a self-similar way—an example of the use of recursion is when a single word is used several times in different situations to express different meanings .

Lastly, displacement in linguistics pertains to the ability of the speakers of a language to communicate with other people about something that has already happened or is about to happen; basically things that are not immediately present temporally or spatially .

Human language, as opposed to other non-human (other animals) forms of communication is open ended. Apes and lions for example use a closed system of communication; meaning, they can only express or communicate with each other about a limited number of things or topics .

The most common perception about language is that it is an effective, and currently one of the most practical and efficient tools to communicate.

Language is a complex tool that enables humans to cooperate or do things as a group—something which is impossible to do in the absence of a complex

system of communication such as language. Sure there are other communication tools aside from language—which is basically a verbal form of communication system. One good example of such communication tools is body language. Body language is practically older than other communication mechanisms such as language and other verbal forms of communication that make use of sounds . However, it is supported by evidence that using verbal forms of communication which well includes the use of language, can prove to be more practical and effective in group settings over other non-verbal forms and vice versa in a one on one setting .

Conventional Perspective vs. Critical Hermeneutic Perspective

The conventional perspective of language suggests that it is a tool that humans can use to communicate, basically about anything, be it something that cannot be immediately present or whatnot. Most of what have been discussed about language up to this point pertains to society's conventional perspective of what language is and how it can be used. People tend to see language merely as a simple tool for communication but there are other disciplines that deal with language in a different way contrary to the typically literal way of dealing with language by lay people . One good example of such is Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics refers to the theory that language and other forms of communication such as texts can have different interpretations. The use of hermeneutics as a theory is prevalent in a variety of disciplines; some examples of which are in theology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and even sub-disciplines such as wisdom literature . Unfortunately, there is no

standard or arbitrary definition of hermeneutics or what communication systems or disciplines related to linguistics its principles can be applied to. There is another sub-discipline in linguistics called exegesis which is basically similar to hermeneutics only that exegesis focuses primarily on the interpretation of texts and symbols, especially biblical and other religious texts and symbols. Knowing this, the critical hermeneutic perspective of language is a much larger discipline because it applies to a wider range of things related to communications; be it written, non-verbal, or verbal communication such as using language as a tool of communication. The term hermeneutic when used as a singular noun usually pertains to an interpretation of a text. A strand of interpretation from a literary work for example can be referred to as a hermeneutic. This is deemed more proper than using the term hermeneutics which refers to the discipline or theory of interpreting non-verbal, verbal, and textual forms of communication. In an academic journal authored by Roberge (2011), the promises of critical hermeneutics as an innovative method and its philosophy within the human, social, and literary sciences were investigated. Hermeneutics has actually been used to interpret biblical and other religious tests. Its use has evolved however. Now, it is also being used to interpret texts aside from the traditional biblical and religious ones as in the case of philosophical hermeneutics . Hermeneutic theories can now be used to draw meanings and interpretations from basically anything that can be critically analyzed. Roberge (2011) argued that the success and effectiveness of critical hermeneutics as a linguistic discipline shall depend on its ability to articulate a theory of meaning with one of action and experience as well as its capacity

to renew an understanding of a particular problem or ideology.

Critical hermeneutics can be used to explain how cultural and social messages show and hide in a typical verbal communication using a particular language as this is how ambiguity of meaning usually allows for a group to represent itself while opening the door for interpretative domination or distortion. It can also be used to show how any action can be more easily understood as opposed to what can usually be understood using typical ideological and moral views. Critical hermeneutics may also be used to clarify how dualism and tension between language and its corresponding contextual meaning are not supposed to be dissociated from the personal interpretation of any individual .

Using a real-life example can be an effective means of presenting what critical hermeneutic is all about and how critical hermeneutic theories can be applied to a real-life situation. In a study authored by Prasad and Mir (2002), a critical hermeneutic analysis of CEO letters to shareholders in an oil industry firm was conducted. They analyzed CEO's letters in the United States petroleum industry during the 1970s and 80s, focusing on its turbulent relationship of OPEM member countries (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), using critical hermeneutics. After analyzing the series of letters, the authors concluded that the letters sent to OPEC member countries from U. S. petroleum industry representatives were intended to convey mostly negative attitudes about the latter's restrictive policies when it comes to negotiating oil deals with the U. S. petroleum industry. It was also asserted that the letters were deployed to produce a certain attitude towards OPEC among their readers that detected attention from the crisis of

legitimacy faced by the domestic oil companies. Despite having arrived at possible interpretations for the letters, the authors recommended that additional tools aside from critical hermeneutics such as the trope of Orientalism be used to help have a better and more guaranteed understanding of what the texts were really all about and what their intention really was .

There are many instances in real-life where critical hermeneutics can be applied. Aside from interpreting letters, modern critical hermeneutics can also be used in consumer and market research. In a study authored by Arnold and Fischer (2004), they attempted to analyze consumer behaviors by using critical and philosophical hermeneutic theories . The authors concluded that critical hermeneutics can be a promising tool in analyzing consumer behaviors in the business sector, especially when dealing with qualitative, subjective, or intangible things, which are well included in the factors that affect market behavior in economics.

Conclusion

In summary, the conventional perspective of language which describes it as a simple tool for communication has evolved into something that is more complex. Words in a language can now be interpreted in a lot of ways which is what linguistic sub-disciplines such as critical hermeneutics are all about. Modern critical hermeneutics on the other hand has evolved too. Before, hermeneutics was confined with deriving meanings and interpretations from biblical and other religious work passages. Now, it is being used in different business sectors as evidenced in the literatures reviewed in this paper.

Critical hermeneutics is actually not a total deviation from the conventional perspective of language but rather an evolved form of it.

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