

Language and power

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



Language is the medium of expression of human beings. Animals may have their own charter of language, but we hardly know about any, that too authorized. Even in our dreams we need the help of language to muse or soliloquize or interact with others. Language, of course, varies with situations and contexts. It goes without saying that language has tremendous power to fit and necessarily mould itself according to the requirements of the given situation. At the dawn of civilization when man had yet to discover a language to communicate among themselves, the exchange of ideas and feelings hardly remained withdrawn.

The sign language born out of gestures came to fill in the hiatus for a given period of time. Yet, the communication without language was lacking in that particular power. Thereafter with the invention of language, man felt comfortable to express his ideas, feelings, sentiments, emotions more effectively. Along with the advancement of language, man now knows the varied forms of its use in different contexts. Mostly, this exercise is not deliberate, but spontaneous.

Language sometimes becomes extraneous in some relationships. It is learnt from authoritative sources that whenever Beckett used to meet Joyce at his residence the duo hardly talked to each other, rather felt the need of feeling each other silently. It is also known that sometimes Joyce spoke up breaking the ice, “ How could the idealist Hume write a history?” Beckett’s reply used to come pat and dry, “ A history of representation.” Such dry conversation can hardly certify any relationship with deep roots. But in such cases silence has a tongue of its own.

Language, no doubt, changes along with the context. Why not take a specific case of a man who has to play several roles at the same time? While, as a caring husband he coos sweet nothings into the ears of his once-upon-a-time-lover wife, his language is driven by true heartfelt emotion, and naturally tends to be poetic. When the same man takes his subordinate in the office to task, he has the most harsh language that he hardly desists to utter and again when he is a loving ‘dad’ at home, the sweetness of his language can win any heart, can pacify the umbrage of any irate tiny tot! See him again as a responsible son of an incapacitated, wizened father and his soothing, caressing words will assuage any wound his once-doting father might have nursed!

This is to show how a person automatically responds to a certain situation with his dynamic, protean language. Language is like a river, it has ripples, it can change its course as and when required, topping all, it has tremendous power to influence, to move, to mesmerize. Are we not reminded of Milton’s Paradise Lost Book One, where infuriated, adamant Satan utters five powerful speeches to rouse the fallen angels in the Lake of Fire, in this context? How is the language of Satan here? Rabble-rousing, inspiring, fiery demagoguery!

If Satan spoke in ordinary language asking them formally to get to their feet to wage war against God, would they be so surcharged with the fiery enthusiasm? As Satan thunders, “ What though the field be lost?? All is not lost-the unconquerable will,/And study of revenge, immortal hate,/And courage never to submit or yield:/And what else not to be overcome?” When

a political leader delivers a harangue, effective in rabble-rousing, it goes without saying that the speech is fiery, that is to say, imbued with an unseen force, that works wonder on the public, by and large.

The effect, otherwise, would have been drab, run-of-the-mill! Language has its own power to fit into any given situation successfully. If it had not been so, the volatility of language would stand questioned. That is why, it is rightly said that the situation moulds and demands the language. Take the case of the Professor in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. After having emotional and physical relation with the girl, good enough to be his own daughter, he feels remorseful, his words fail him.

He is so repentant that he pays a visit to the girl's family. He is such guilty in his own eyes that he does not defend himself when an Enquiry Commission is run in order to give him a chance to defend himself and absolve himself subsequently. He has no power or zeal to speak out in his own defense.

Language has tremendous power to change the mind of a convict as we have seen in *The Bishop's Candlesticks*. Bishop with his enthusing, assuaging, unctuous speech can dissuade the convict from pilfering the gold candlesticks. The words of the Christian Father are replete with affection, warmth. Such is the force of language that even an incorrigible convict can be brought to the path of virtues from that of vices and knavery.

A doctor has the power of boosting up the mental strength of an ailing patient by his soothing, encouraging and positive words, a reassuring pat on the

back and in most cases supported by proper treatment , this contributes a lot in coming round of the patient.

Kiran Bedi, the Indian I. P. S Officer has already proved that if the prisoners in a jail are given humane, compassionate treatment they can easily and obviously change into better leaves. She experimented with the recidivists in Tihar jail, New Delhi, India, and reported of favorable results in almost cent percent cases. In lieu of harsh language they were treated with soft, friendly words. And, it brought back their lost self-respect and they began to teem with a new-found energy and confidence in themselves and their stigmatized lives.

A successful lawyer with the force of language along with proper witness and evidence can make his client win the case. A teacher can hold the attention of the students day after day with his power of words, and of course, the content catered interestingly.. The man who can fit his language into the demands of the situation successfully hardly loses the love of anybody. He is considered to be the ' witty' person around. Shakespeare's

Othello was an honest lover, an emotionally surcharged person, but his Iago was an ' artist in crime' not just for his sinister actions but for his witty, deliberately-contrived language that enabled himself to achieve his objective. In Macbeth, the three witches' equivocal language veers the direction of the play, quite considerably. In King Lear , too, Cordelia's plain , un-ornamental, unexaggerated language did not go well with situation. The situation demanded a little more adulation from Cordelia. Only because of

the lack of filigree in the language, she suffered throughout her life till she breathed her last!

Thus, language has several shades of its own. Hundreds of situations demand hundreds of treatments and responses. When the subordinate employee approaches his boss for a leave of a couple of days for an immediate assignment, can he talk rudely? No, never. He has to keep his boss in good humor, so that his request may not be turned down in a jiffy.

Man has to remain cautious about the use of language. Even a slip of tongue can end a husband-wife-bond of warmth and togetherness . Similarly a word of pride can trigger off an internecine war between two nations over years. No doubt, language can make or mar anything and everything. It is absolutely true!!