

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

T. Fedchenko student JT-72

S. V. Podolkova – E L Adviser

Words and language are a quite amazing - and unique - human attribute and invention. For a start, words don't just create meaning, they also create feeling. Meaning can be straightforward and literal (some people call this a word's denotation; or it can be quite 'deep' and 'hidden', that is, we can say that a word literally means one thing but somehow suggests quite another (this is also called a word's connotation).

This is the process of interpretation and this always relies on context. It is the effect of context that helps us towards a particular interpretation of a word; context means the word's relationship to other things - for example, other words - around it: but also the social situation surrounding its use; even because we know what it is not (i.e. we understand the term 'coward' more because we hold the term 'hero' in such high regard rather than because of any meaning the word 'coward' itself contains).

Language has two key qualities that allow it create and shape meaning. It has content - that is, it contains meaning; and it has form - that is, it makes shapes and sounds. Form and content are two aspects of language you are expected to discuss in your essays as writers use them both to help make and shape meaning.

The formal aspects of language - sight and sound - are especially important in poetry as, unlike any other form of writing, its user is allowed to split sentences apart at will and be playful with sound and shape to help add to the meaning created.

A third important aspect of language is structure - the way its meaning unfolds in, for example, interesting, compelling and persuasive ways.

The human language faculty is thought to be fundamentally different from and of much higher complexity than those of other species. Human language is highly complex in that it is based on a set of rules relating symbols to their meanings, thereby forming an infinite number of possible utterances from a finite number of elements. The word "language" can also be used to describe the set of rules that makes this possible, or the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules.

Communicating direction occurs when we use language to cause or prevent an action. The simplest examples would be when we yell "Stop!" or "Come here!" Unlike the communication of information, commands can't be true or false. On the other hand, the reasons for giving command may be true or false and hence be amenable to logical critique.

Language is a subtle and complex instrument used to communicate an incredible number of different things, but for our purposes here we can reduce the universe of communication to four basic categories: information, direction, emotion, and ceremony. The first two are often treated together because they express cognitive meaning while the latter two commonly express emotional meaning.

Deliberate use of emotional language can be seen in many political speeches and commercial advertisements — these are carefully constructed to get people to share an emotional reaction to something. In casual conversation, emotional language is likely less deliberate because the expression of emotion is a natural aspect of how we communicate with one another. Almost no one constructs normal arguments in a purely logical form. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, but it complicates the analysis of an argument.

Regardless of the motive, extracting the emotional language to leave just the raw propositions and inferences is important to ensure that you evaluate the right things. Sometimes we have to be careful because even a single word can have a literal meaning which is entirely neutral and fair, but which also carries emotional impact that affects how a person will react.

If you want to argue well and do a good job at evaluating the arguments of others, you need to learn how to use language well. The better you are at structuring your thoughts and ideas, the better you will be able to understand them.