

“Peer Group” Impact on Discursive Acts of Individuals

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Introduction

The speaker has his linguistic individuality even though he belongs to a defined band of speakers. However, this linguistic individuality is neither static nor unchangeable. In the opposite, as well as the language itself, he is in continuous development. The individual, in terms of a connoisseur and a user of this system modifies his linguistic behaviour in accordance with the pragmatic situations of the code realism.

In this paper we are going to concentrate on the impact that “The peer group” has on the discursive acts of the individual, while he is part of the group. When we are talking about a group we should mean the joining of individuals who regularly cooperate in a consistent and structured pattern and who share values and a sense of belonging to a group. According to the psychologists, the word group means more than a joining of individuals.

We have carried out numerous surveys, whose analysis has helped us to find the answer to many questions we have raised. By this paper we have focused on the Albanian reality. The numerous and uncontrolled demographic movements of the population within frontiers and abroad for the past 21 years, the low level of the use of standard language, the deepening of socio-economic and cultural differences among Albanian speakers, are the determining factors on the vernacular and situational stratifications, in which Albanian speakers of different age groups find themselves. We have focused on:

1. on the theoretical side of the problem
2. on the concrete overview of the situation by making surveys.
3. drawing of conclusions and making of suggestions

Never in the world could we find two individuals (whether they are brothers-twins) who have the same speaking (who speak alike). (Shkurtaj, 2003) Given this fact, we may say that everybody has something special, which distinguish him from others in the linguistic area, as well. Not only do people differ in appearance, on the anthropological side, but they also differ in their speaking. Nevertheless, we should admit the fact that however individualist the individual can be, he can't realize the communication alone. *“To learn the language, to find himself in that outfit of collective expression, the individual needs to be part of a social group, within which he shows not only his individuality, but also his linguistic solidarity”.* (Shkurtaj, 2003, p. 78)

One individual speaker who belongs to a defined social community becomes part of a linguistic variation that this community uses. But, the individual gradually goes off this close social community and he has to face “others ‘language”’. The individual copes with a complex linguistic situation. By being part of different social groups, he becomes a conductor of the linguistic features of the group he takes part. Colloquial speaking is the best carrier of the slang, and it serves as a pattern for the child's speaking. Furthermore, the social context is a very important factor on the linguistic acquisition. The non-verbal context of the adults ‘speaking, the linguistic stimuli gained from his mother and the adults, motherese, the ratio between the adults ‘conversation and that of a child has its unchallenged place in the language acquisition. Awareness that the child is a profoundly social creature has considerably complicated the study of speaking development. A new-born is *“a system that is organized, directed and stabilized and progressively modelled and which is gradually included in the cultural dimensions of its natural and human environment.”* (Shkurtaj, 2004, p. 177)

How much can the group affect the linguistic formation of the individual?

Is there a relationship between the biological age of the individual and his linguistic changes that are influenced by the group?

The linguistic behaviour is a social behaviour and it always occurs, in a certain way, in sociologically defined linguistic actions. (Shkurtaj, 2003)

The method used for this study

The discourse acquisition includes an exchange of relations between linguistic systems and the world around us. We have studied the linguistic distinctions and differences among speakers, using as reference the region and the area where the speaker lives, the socio-economic conditions, the sex, the race and the age. According to the theory of the individual's actions, such factors affect people's speaking only to the extent they represent social groups with whom the speakers identify themselves: in other words, not so much the familiarity with a specific variety of speaking than the will to be identified with the type of people who use it (Hudson, 2002). In regards with this issue, in a sociolinguistic perspective there are theoretical approaches and numerous surveys.

Meanwhile our study focuses on the relation between the biological age of the individual and the impact of the "peer group" on its linguistic performance, on the discursive acts. We tend to examine whether there is a connection between the biological age of the individual and the influence of the "peer group" on the individual during the discursive acts. For this purpose we have carried out research in several age groups.

During our work, we have taken into consideration the respect to some conditions:

1. Four groups were analyzed :
 - 3-5 years old
 - 10-12 years old
 - 15-17 years old
 - 40-45 years old
2. It was really important for us that all individuals included, the age groups included in this study should have approximately the same features: the economic level the family entourage, the address etc. The only distinction among group was the age. For all the groups , the survey had the same duration.
3. Individuals underwent the same linguistic experiments. Within each age group there were some minigroups having different sociolinguistic features in order to see more closely how the "peer group affects the individual who presents different characteristics .
4. We have considered the process of speech development in three stages since even the psychology of age development deals with it : (Shashaj, 1996)

a) words acquisition,

b) pragmatic acquisition of grammatical structures,

c) development of connected speech.

These stages can't be seen separated from each-other, because during the process of linguistic acquisition by children there is an interweaving and combination of the three stages.

Survey results

This paper deals with the study of whether there is a connection between the biological age of the individual and the impact that might have the peer group on his speaking. Hence, the different surveys have been done on the basis of age groups.

First group (3-5 years old)

We closely attended 3-5 year-old children and we analysed parts of the groups belonging to the same socio-economic characteristics. It is the right age when children begin their relationship among friends of the same age, in other words, it is the age when these relationships begin to be shaped. We analysed the children 'speaking. During this biological period, the individual is not influenced by the social entourage part of which he is. The children included in these surveys were in the kindergarten when being at the age of 3-5, they spend 30% of their time with each-other. During this period they are mostly carriers of familial speaking characteristics, since they spend most of their time with their family. The minute impact, hardly imperceptible of the group of this age on the linguistic aspect is related to the fact that children are still in the process of foreign language learning, are closely related to the family, and they consider themselves as a close part of it. We can say that the family is the essential influential and than in this period of the child's growth television has a great impact on his speaking.

Second group (10-12 years old)

Parts of this group are children of 10-12 years old, pupils of the base education. It is the moment when the child becomes the discourse assignee, creates his linguistic individuality by showing even his exterior on it. In this age the complexity of social interactions increases, whereas the symbolic forms of communication begin to overcome the physical ones. From surveys, it resulted that the linguistic performance of the children has improved. This deals with the fact that the time they spend with each-other is longer than about 60%. The influence is more visible on the lexical area.

Third group (15-17 years old)

We surveyed 15-17 year-old teenagers. It was the group in which the social entourage impact on the linguistic performance was bigger than other age groups. This fact is related to the changes occurring at social and organisative level. The individuals of this age spend already more time with the group and pay more attention to it. Another factor is the increase of the ability to take responsibilities during the middle childhood and moreover, the group takes a great importance as a context for the peers' interaction. The members of the group of this age have a sense of belonging (possession) and they see the group as a share of values, as a source of self-identification and evaluation. The psychologists explain quite well the relation between teens and "Peer group". Through our paper, we emphasize the great influence on the linguistic aspect. The linguistic impacts are mostly on lexicon, but this does not mean that there are no impacts on syntax and morphology. The individuals of this age use their linguistic code which is rich in phrases borrowed on TV: different programmes and films phrases. We can also notice even the use of foreign words having an offensive, derisive and blasphemous hint.

Fourth group (40-45 years old)

This age group has shown a kind of "resistance" towards the impact of the group on the linguistic aspect. Surveys carried out have shown a sensible decrease of its influence. The response to this decrease can be found even in the brain, the way how it functions and the way how the zones related to the language are created and structured. The neurolinguistics assert that the opportunities to change linguistic patterns are smaller at this age.

The biological bases of the language

The biological growth of the individuals leads to a significant change of "the peer group" in its linguistic aspect. The trajectory recognizes increase and then decrease. Psychologists give their arguments, and if we see it from a psycholinguistic perspective, this change of the influence trajectory is related to the linguistic structures in the brain, which in a certain point of the biological growth are shaped and tend to change less.

The language is seen as "a general human quality, genetically defined, a component of the human mind". All people have the same biological basis for language. They all inherit the genotype. There are universal man's language features which the individual speaker is equipped with, despite the linguistic variation he uses. "*Human beings genetically inherit a linguistic skill, which helps them to learn the language.*" (Memushaj, 2003, p. 81)

According to researchers, the main functions of the language are performed on the brain, in perisylvian zone. The main functions of the language include:

- 1- The submission of words and sentences forms in quotations and the definition of their literal meaning.
- 2- The selection of structures and the creation of formal codes of lexical and morphological elements.

At present, discussions are going on about the way how these main processes of language are related to the close localization in the brain. A lot of experiments have been carried out in order to prove it. In this case, the zone of the experiment is narrowed in the region of Broca and in the region of Wernicke so that we can notice how these zones affect the language functions, in linguistic understanding and generating. The stages the language process are related to the specific brain structures, which are implemented in specific areas of the cortex. This has been certified by the numerous studies and experiments performed for the past two centuries.

Chomsky categorically emphasizes that *speaking is pre-programmed and it is acquired as a result of maturity rather than learning.* (Chomsky, 2000, p. 107)

Based on the conviction according to which the discourse is creative and productive as well, Chomsky emphasizes that the most important linguistic processes require the active participation of the individual.

According to Chomsky, the individuals are born with linguistic skills and with particular linguistic premises, which enable them to learn how to speak. Even though it has been discussed for a long time about this linguistic and biological programming, the scientists have admitted Chomsky's point of view on the complicated processes of the discourse teaching. He has explained the way a child learns how to speak, how to create and how to understand a sentence of a language. As a linguist, he has described the type of knowledge necessary for this purpose, knowledge which defined as *a linguistic competence*.

The discourse, according to Chomsky, is a set of rules, which the individual should find out, establishing then its rules, based on the hearing and analysis of conversations heard from others and in this case, peer group plays its role. The individual tries to verify these rules by reformulating sentences according to the elaborated models. The fact that individuals seek to find out the language rules, which they are learning, makes the discourse acquisition turn into a process of hypotheses verifications by them.

Chomsky considers as unique the operating processes during the discourse acquisition, in the sense that they can't acquire some knowledge of the congenital nature of discourse. If the individual passes through the long path of possible hypotheses, the discourse acquisition is likely that it is neither too fast nor too inevitable, as it usually happens.

For years, George Ojemann has dealt with the brain study and the way how it functions. Part of his job was even the study of the relationship existing between brain and language. He combined the brain map of about 117 individuals whom he had been operating on for years. Only in one region did he find a spot where most people had a critical language area, or CLA, and "most" means 79 percent of the patients.

According to him, the brain structures related to the linguistic aspect are created early and remain stable. The individuals' brain is simultaneously different and same. Never do two people store the same information in the same manner and at the same place (Medina, 2008). The neurological differences in people bring to the linguistic differences. Individuals are not passive creatures. They are active in their social entourage. The adaptation is a tendency of all organisms which adapt to the entourage and this is the same when it comes to language. According to Piaget, since his birth, the man seeks to adapt to the entourage. This adaptation occurs as a result of two other processes: *assimilation* through which we should understand the use of existing cognitive structures so that we could acquire new structures, thus, the adaptation of the new information to the existing schemes and *accumulation*. Accumulation means the change of the existing schemes (mental systems or categories of perception and experience) or the creation of new schemes in response to the new information. These adaptations are intellectual, physical and cognitive. To further these thoughts, Piaget emphasizes that the basic values of the cognitive and biological development are the same, therefore, knowledge, as a process in itself, should not be separated from other functions of the organism. (Piaget, 2004)

The individual, as a human being, comes to life and grows up among people. This close coexistence of the individual with his family, the society and the broad social entourage has a great impact on his linguistic education.

According to Chomsky, " *In principle, the source of such knowledge can be found in the child's entourage or the biologically defined skill of the brain/mind, particularly in that integral part of the brain, which we could call language skill; The interaction of these factors produces the system of knowledge used to speak and understand.*" (Chomsky, 2008, p. 16)

Consequently, there are basically three factors to be taken into consideration:

- Genetically defined principles of language skills,
- Genetically defined gear of general learning,
- Linguistic experience of the individual who grows up in a speakers' community.

The interactions of these factors lead to a knowledge system which is represented in the brain/mind as a mature state of the language skill. This system of knowledge gives rise to the interpretation of linguistic phrases.

Conclusions

According to the specialists, the problem of the peer group's impact on the individual, in general, proves to be an issue called "dependence". (Miller, 2007, p. 576) The level of the "peer group" impact on the individual is related to many factors. This impact directly varies depending on the biological age of the individuals reaching its peak at the age of adolescence and slowing down at the mature age of the individual. Furthermore, the level of impact is different in different individuals. The more the child grows up the more he spends time with his peers and relatively less time with adults, including parents as well. When being a teenager, for many reasons, the group gets a special value to the individual. The last one needs to feel part of the "peer group" and as a result, there is the impact on the discursive acts. The linguistic structures existing in the brain are not rigid; they keep shaping until the entire linguistic structuring.

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