

FOYDALANILGAN ADABIYOTLAR

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LANGUAGE FOR COMMUNICATION OF IDENTITY

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the introduction of the relationship between language and identity one desires to portray affects one's linguistic choices, and inversely how one's linguistic choices affect the identity displayed to others.*

Key words. *Personal identity, language, social group*

As Thornborrow explains, one's identity is not always fixed. Instead it is something which we are constantly building and negotiating all our lives'.¹⁰ Since, as mentioned above, language is one of the most basic ways people can establish their own identity and shape others' views of them; it is natural that people will use language as a tool to do just that, although often this is unconscious. Chambers tells us that people unconsciously express their identity through their dress, manners, possessions and speech. He goes on to explain that speech is much less manipulable and much harder to control consciously, and is therefore much more revealing of our identity.¹¹ People are aware of this, both consciously and unconsciously, and will therefore adapt the way they speak as far as possible to portray a certain version of their identity. The language a speaker uses is decoded by others, which allows them to read the identity of the speaker. As this decoding depends on the specific language as used by speakers, linguistic manipulations and adaptations can be employed to purposely alter the decoding of

linguistic signals, and in turn the exact identity a speaker displays. In this way a speaker is able to highlight certain elements of his identity, mask others, and to some extent even invent certain characteristics in order to influence others' decoding of the identity he displays through his use of language. As seen above, one's identity is always multi-faceted. Of course, every human being has a personal identity, being that which is related specifically to oneself as an individual, but at the same time one has a series of group identities. One belongs simultaneously to various social groupings, including familial groups, gender groups, age groups, occupational groups, groups relating to one's geographical origin, social class and educational background, to one's cultural background and of course, to one's linguistic community.

Individuals can also place themselves within or outside these social groups and communities using language as a marker of membership, partial membership or non-membership. This takes place because the linguistic choices an individual makes shape others' views regarding their identity and their inclusion in various social groups. Of course this also works in the opposite direction, meaning the identity individuals wish to portray to others will affect the linguistic choices they make and therefore others' decoding of their identity signals. Membership of these various groups is not mutually exclusive, meaning one can and does belong to several groups at a time. This could be visually portrayed by an extremely complicated diagram of concentric circles and Venn Diagrams within which one's own individual identity fits in the smallest segment. This is then surrounded by any number of circles, some overlapping and some fully encompassed within larger circles, each relating to a different identity group to which one belongs. In this way it can be seen, as Jespersen implies within the title of his aforementioned book, that one's individual identity is a subset of the more general group identity. The use of language to manipulate personal identity through group identity one portrays is, in fact, a display of an occurrence known within linguistics. This is described by Meyerhoff as the way in which individuals can strategically use language as a potent symbol of identity when testing or

maintaining intergroup boundaries. This can take place as either divergence, when one highlights the differences between the identity group one belongs to and that of one's interlocutor, or as convergence, when in order to help form or nurture a social bond with the interlocutor, and to show solidarity and amiability towards that person, one may use language to play down the differences between oneself and the other person. A speaker is able to choose from the various linguistic choices available to him, knowing that these choices will be read by the listener as identity markers. The choices made can either create and or reinforce the bond between the two (convergence), or can work to increase the social distance between them (divergence). It is important to emphasise at this stage that this process almost always happens on a fully unconscious level.

In conclusion, as can be seen above, our identity is often defined by using a contrast or comparison with others, and the placement (or non-placement) of ourselves within certain social groups, however large or small. Thornborrow states that 'social groups and communities use language as a means of identifying their members', a concept which of course works both ways,¹² leading to the creation of both in- and out-groups by the use of language, thus including members and excluding outsiders.

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