SOCIAL FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE (LANGUAGE AND GROUP COHESION)

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Abstract

We are going to detect the problem of origin of human language in the context of group cohesion. We can see a relation between language and some kind of emotion; mainly smile and laughter which we consider as a connection to group cohesion and language. We are going to discuss three different hypotheses regarding the fact that the content of conversations can effectively influence the consistency of large social groups (hypothesis of gossips, Scheherezade effect and hypothesis of social contract). Human language allows the grooming of more than one member of the group at once; other activities can be performed besides grooming, as well, and allows the exchange of social information about events in human social network that occurred in our absence and it gives us dominant advantage.

Key words: *language, group cohesion, social function, social group, laughter, smile, Bergson*

1. INTRODUCTION

We are going to outline the problem of social function of language with main respect to the language and group cohesion. What is the relationship of language and society? And more, what is the relationship of development of language, society and group cohesion? Language tends to be considered the only ability that distinguishes humans from other living organisms. This is mainly due to the fact that language allows us to exchange information and thus influence the mindset of our surroundings. Language has played an essential role in shaping the culture. Language formation is such problematic and old issue, that the Paris Linguistic Academy has banned all discussions about it in 1866 (Koukolík 2011). Contemporary research has moved far away from that ban and some new scientific disciplines have been established: comparative psychology, comparative linguistic, evolutionary psychology, cognitive science, robotics etc. the main question connected with the language is very simple: to what extend is language a result of biological evolution and to what extend it is regarding to cultural evolution? (Koukolík 2011). Answering this simple question is very difficult, and running. Some linguists (for example Noam Chomsky, or Steven Jay Gould) consider language as a result of influence other evolutionary actions, as for example brain growth was. It has not been the result of natural selection, but the result of exaltation. We consider exaltation as a proper use for a different purpose, to which it was originally established for. Exaptation is reading and writing; brain uses areas which have developed for example for manipulation with small objects or for visual distinction of shapes. (Koukolík 2011). On the other side there are authors, who think, that language is result of natural selection (for example Steven Pinker). According to Pinker language means instinct. He considers the evidence of language universals. Anthropologists in the last century found out that all human groups, even the most primitive and those with the simplest material culture use language with complex grammar. Here we come to a crucial issue: hypothesis about the origins of human language.

2. ORIGINS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

Tracing the origins of human language is an important key to understanding how we have become so unique. Indeed, because of the language we are able to communicate together more effectively than animals. (Diamond 2004) Positive progress, formation of culture, art, technology etc. was made possible due to speech which developed differently than animal speech. The origins of human language since Darwin's times remained an interesting, but probably insoluble evolutionary problem. How did the man overcome the gap between himself and the animal?

If we accept the widespread assumption that a man evolved from animals, which lack the ability of human language, then human language had developed together with human skull, pelvis, tools, etc. First, there had to be some sort of transitional stage of speech, which linked monkey noises and Shakespearean sonnets. (Diamond 2004) Explaining the origins of human language by scientists proved to be much more difficult than to trace the origins of the skull, pelvis, or the first instruments (all of this could be preserved, discovered, dated, but the spoken word disappears immediately). African monkey – macaque can boast with the most sophisticated animal language.

For obvious reasons, the wild macaques, similar to other animals, are constantly forced to deal with situations where communication is essential. Macaque must recognize martial eagle (the biggest predator of macaques) from African vulture that feeds on dead animals and poses no threat to living macaques. In case the martial eagle appears, it is necessary to respond properly and warn others. If the eagle is not recognized in time, the macaque dies; if macaque fails to communicate the threat to its relatives, it is their end along with a part of your genes becoming lost, as well. In case that macaque thinks that it saw an eagle, while a vulture flew over its head, macaque would be wasting its time by redundant protection, while other members of the group continue to collect food without being disturbed. (Diamond 2004).

3. RELATIONSHIP OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL GROUP SIZE

Communication and language are related to the size of the social group of primates. As reported by Dunbar (1996), the number of members in social groups of primates is determined by different ecological, demographic and cognitive variables – Dunbar and Hill (2003) came to the probable number of 60 members of australopithecines, 80 members of Homo habilis, 100 members of Homo erectus and 150 members of modern humans. This figure (100 - 150) in contemporary society of developed countries corresponds approximately to the number of people that an individual can ask for a service and expect a positive response.

The observations of evolutionary psychologists suggest that wild primates devote approximately 20% of their free time to mutual care for their fur – so-called grooming. If a group of 150 modern humans performed such grooming, they would spend 43% of the daily schedule. On the other hand, humans spend time with conversation, which makes for 20% of daily time, i.e. equal share that nonhuman primates spend with grooming. (Dunbar, Barrett, Lycett 2007)

For many evolutionary psychologists it represents the explanation of the fact that language developed as a facility of further advancement of social grooming. Human language allows the grooming of more than one member of the group at once; other activities can be performed besides grooming, as well, and allows the exchange of social information about events in human social network that occurred in our absence. (Koukolík 2006). One of the most interesting problems related to the origins of language is examining the question of the extent to which language is innate, i.e. phenomenon caused by evolution. Several scientific theories offer replies to this problem. The authors, who are convinced that language evolved gradually, believe that this development continued for several thousands of years. Fully developed language, as estimated by many scientists, appeared approximately 50,000 years ago, at similar time as symbolic art.

Theory of innate language base is confirmed by the research of deaf Nicaraguan children who were home educated before 1970; many of them formed their own family sign language, a system of gestures through which children communicated. Older children taught younger ones and nowadays this language (NSL - Nicaraguan Sign Language) is used by approximately 800 people aged 4 to 45 years. The development of NSL has commenced with children initially categorizing complex events into essential elements, then from these they shaped complicated expressions. Younger children enriched this process and transformed the sign language into language system. (Koukolík 2007)

If one thinks about innateness of language, one has to have in mind mainly the congenital basics – predispositions of language. These predispositions are developed relatively quickly by environmental influences – communication, and vice versa – if children aged around 2-5 do not speak at all, they will

never learn to speak. This is confirmed by Indian girls Kamala and Amala, who were found in a wolf den, or Laotian girl Mai case who was closed and isolated in a cage for several years by her superstitious family because they feared she was being infected with rabies. (Dougles 1995)

4. LANGUAGE AND GROUP COHESION

The above examples show the dual conditionality of linguistic competence acquisition language is, on one hand, the result of neurobiological susceptibility of specific brain centres of a man and, on the other hand, it is the result of cultural influence of human communicating community. Both conditions specific neural apparatus and early experience with language practise are prerequisites for language competence.

If language is a form of long-distance care maintaining consistency of large groups, one unanswered question remains - what is the importance of syntax, because if it was just to keep the community united, the nonverbal communication would be sufficient as pointed by Barett, Lycett, Dunbar (2007). There are three different hypotheses regarding the fact that the content of conversations can effectively influence the consistency of large social groups.

1. Hypothesis of gossips – a key factor for the cohesion of major groups, according to Dunbar, is the exchange of information on current and future states of social networks – gossips in the broadest sense (Dunbar 1996)
2. Hypothesis of social contract - according to Deacon, language developed to facilitate the coordination of social contracts (such as marriage); (Deacon 1997)
3. Scheherazade effect – according to Miller, language evolved by sexual selection in the context of finding a partner. (Miller 2001).

5. SMILE AND LAUGH

A social function may be attributed to all emotions and this argument is even stronger in case of a smile. It is not only an expression of positive mood, but it helps us to strengthen relationships, build new ones, to reconcile, etc. Several studies confirm the nature of social smile – for example, A. Fridlund found that people are smiling especially in situations where someone can observe them to do so. (Lindová, 2009) Fridlund allowed his students to watch humorous videos with friends or alone, but knowing that a friend is nearby, or completely alone.

He captured most of smiles when friends were watching a video together, somewhat less in the case of a friend being nearby, and the lowest number of smiles occurred if they watched a video alone. Mimic expression – a smile is extremely important to our everyday social functioning. From the smile, which we discussed, there is only a small step to *laughter*.

Human laughter is a unique phenomenon in the animal kingdom, although some parallels can be found in apes. (Barrett, Dunbar, Lycett, 2007). In addition to its social function, laughter has some prominent features – it promotes the release of endogenous opioids. After a fit of laughter, one can clearly feel relaxed and comfortable. Research (Berk, 1989; Zillman, 1993, Weisenberg, 1995) confirmed that both levels of opiates and the pain threshold are higher after a fit of laughter. According to Dunbar's hypothesis, laughter evolved to take over as the main means of sociality stimulation. (Dunbar 1996)

Dunbar notes that there are two important facts in the development of laughter: 1. it is difficult to maintain a conversation with someone who does not laughs at all – one needs a response that assures him whether the listener is interested or not.

In particular, women use laughter when meeting with a man as a means of expression of interest to continue the interaction with him. (Barrett, Dunbar, Lycett, 2007). A poor response from the listener indicates that he is losing time with us. 2. Let us attempt a self-reflection – how much of one's time and energy is required to make others laugh? It is a considerable amount of time and energy –

listeners, who laugh a lot (and this does not apply just tor conversations, but also to lecturing, public appearances, etc.) pay attention to the speaker. (Barrett, Dunbar, Lycett, 2007)

In the history of philosophy Bergson's concept of laughter has dominant position, as it is a topic that philosophers rather avoid (exceptions can be found, for example, in works of Schopenhauer or Scruton). In his essay *Le Rire*, Bergson does not try to form a definition of laughter and the humorousness; he rather examined what is considered humorous and when one laughs. He does not discuss laughter as a physiological reaction, but he attempts to analyze situations that produce physiological response. Humorousness, in his opinion, is induced only by humans. A country may be beautiful, graceful, unique, immaterial, or ugly, but never humorous. One laughs at an animal, because he is surprised by its human behaviour or expression. (Bergson 1993)

Another moment, which Bergson points out, is the numbness that usually accompanies laughter. Once we feel empathy with the man who tripped on a banana peel, we are unable to laugh. The amount of serious and tragic events, according to Bergson, would turn into a tragedy if one did not put any distance from an emotion. An important condition for the development of the humorous is therefore a necessary distance, emotion blackout. The third fact to which Bergson draws attention is that laughter needs an echo. Humorousness cannot be enjoyed, if one feels lonely "... how many times has it been said that laughter of the audience in the theatre is the more powerful, the more the room is filled?" (Bergson, 1993, p.18)

Bergson saw the mechanism of laughter in stiffness, rigidity, inertia. He mentioned an example of a man who performed all its activities with mathematical precision. Some mischief-maker, however, moved the objects around. Now, this man wanted to sit in a chair and fell to the ground, he wanted to soak the squid pen and pulled out some mud. The victim is humorous – he should stop or alter his movement, but he continues in a learnt manner. Humans laugh at the mechanical stiffness, stupor. Laughter comes when a man is reduced to a mechanical body, to a machine. An example for Bergson were the people who stumbled and fell, then those who were victims of practical jokes, in which their usual habits and distractibility were being used. We could consider smile and mainly laught as main source of later relation between language and group cohesion.

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