

The Term of Language and Dialect and their Borderline

Charikleia Grigoriou*

Philologist, Greece

*Corresponding Author: Charikleia Grigoriou, Philologist, Greece, Email: roses_maria1984@yahoo.gr

ABSTRACT

Current publication refers to the terms of language and dialect and their specific traits. As the limits between these concepts are not standard, there are a lot of misunderstandings. However, as it is proved, there is not a strong dividing line and the use of one or another depends on the purposes of speaker.

Keywords: Language, dialect, speaker

It is a fact that the limits between the concept of language and dialect are fluid. However, it is particularly interesting to approach and present these two terms, as well as to study whether there is a criterion of differentiation between them. As far as language is concerned, it is a code which is acquired by members of society in order to communicate each other. It consists of elements that speakers recognize as their own, such as phonemes, formats and words (Hudson, 1980, p. 39). However, language speakers do not use all these elements, while at linguistic analysis there are elements that differ between speakers (Chambers, Trudgill, 1984).

The consequent geographical differentiation of languages results in the emergence of geographical linguistic varieties, which are called as dialects or local idioms. The differentiation of dialects is criticized by the common dialect, that is to say, the official language of the state, which is promoted by both general use and organized education (Hudson, 1980, p. 32-33). It should be mentioned that in modern society the common language is gradually possessed by all citizens. Finally, the dialect is defined in relation to the language and as a result it is supported that some speakers speak the dialect of a language or they do not speak a language but a dialect (Triantafyllidis, 1963, p. 299-320). Since the dialect is strongly differentiated and deviated from the common language at every level and its

speakers are not easily understood by the speakers of the common language, the term is a supreme distinction (Sapir, 1949).

Given the above, it is obvious that the concepts of language and dialect are not distinguished by a strong dividing line, as both refer to two different levels of the same hierarchy. The use of one or other term depends directly on the purpose of the speaker in order to identify one language as distinct from the other. So, some people base their definition on linguistic reasons and focus on lexical, editorial, phonological and morphological differences. In this case, if two people speak understanding each other, then they speak dialects of the same language, and if understanding is difficult, then they speak different languages (Haugen, 1972).

Another basic criterion for differentiation is social and cultural factors, with the result that speakers are mainly based on issues related to cultural heritage. Given this criterion, languages are prestigious, formal and written, while dialects are mostly informal, oral and subordinate (Delveroudi, 2001).

According to my personal opinion therefore, the difference between language and dialect is not grammatical or lexical, neither objective nor intralingual. What is more, there are no grammatical criteria in order to be determined the difference between language and dialect, and as a result small

grammatical and lexical differences are dialectal differentiation, while large grammatical and vocabulary differences are a kind of linguistic differentiation. The distinction between the two terms is therefore a more social, political and historical issue and not an intra-lingual one. This fact is assured by their difference, which is distinguished by a strong ideological-political character (Panagiotidis, 2013). A typical example is Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian, which are considered by native speakers as separate languages, while linguists consider them as dialects of the Serbo-Croatian language. That is why the sociologists support that language is a dialect “equipped with army” (Delveroudi, 2001).

In conclusion, it is realized that there is no structural differentiation, neither one is superior to the other, but there is political differentiation, as the conjuncture overturns the facts and the establishment of one or another as superior and formal.

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