

THE SIMPLIFICATION OF LANGUAGE IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF LIMITING OF COMPLEX THINKING

Alessandro Vitale

University of Milan, Italy

alessandro.vitale@unimi.it

Abstract. *The paper is a study of the cases of the language impoverishment that is currently taking place in developed countries. The paper is based on the collected evidence and multidisciplinary scientific research. The author outlines his points of view on possible ways of this problem solution.*

Key words: *complexity of language, language impoverishment, IQ, Flynn effect, discourse analysis, politics and language, policy recommendations.*

Throughout the developed world there is an impoverishment of language. As a consequence, a decline in the average IQ of the population of these countries, which, on the other hand, from the postwar period to the late 1990s had always increased: in the last two decades it has been declining instead. In contrast to the steady increase in the average IQ of the population (about three points every decade) over the years (the Flynn effect, discovered by this American psychologist in the 1980s), regardless of the culture to which one belongs, there is now a reversal of the trend. In fact, research shows that the level of intelligence measured by tests decreases in more developed countries.

Teenagers (when not children) left alone for hours, with a TV that broadcasts diseducational programs that foment violent competitiveness (where yelling and insults take the place of constructive dialogues and monologues), are unsuitable in forming, in everyone but particularly in those who are forming character and their own culture, an articulate, comprehensive language made up of synonyms, antonyms, rhetorical figures and syllogisms.

The issue of the importance of in-depth vocabulary is little debated, especially in the younger generation. In modern communication, the cornerstone that takes most emphasis is immediacy: one must get a message to many recipients in a short time, regardless of how they will interpret it. Of this theory, it is important to recognize the value of speed, which, in certain areas (such as "breaking news"), is essential and extremely useful. A short message with rapid dissemination can help in news reporting and is less scattershot in everyday communication. However, this implies without any doubt an impoverishment of the lexicon.

It is no coincidence that several studies show the decrease in lexical knowledge and the impoverishment of language: it is not only the reduction in the vocabulary used, but also in the linguistic nuances that enable us to elaborate and formulate complex thought. The gradual disappearance of tenses (subjunctive, imperfect, compound forms of the future, past participle) gives rise to thinking almost always based on the present tense, limited to the present moment, i.e., incapable of projections in time.

The simplification of tutorials, the disappearance of capitalization and punctuation are examples of "death strikes" to accuracy and variety of expression. Fewer words and fewer conjugated verbs imply less ability to express emotions and fewer opportunities to process thought.

Studies have shown how some of the violence in the public and private spheres stems directly from the inability to describe one's emotions through words. Empathy obviously is reduced in the absence of this ability. Studies from the French school of Marty & Coll. and the Canadian school of Taylor & Coll. have analyzed the pathology called "alexithymia," which consists of the absence or inadequacy of the language necessary to mentally process emotional tensions.

Often, to cope with this and in the absence of mental resources, chemical means are employed, generating addictions. Or, emotional tensions, no longer dealt with and mentally processed at the level of the cerebral cortex, the seat of rational thought, bypass it, overloading the hypothalamus, neuro-endocrine and neurovegetative systems (which regulate various bodily functions) with stimuli: the result is the onset of somatic diseases. Moreover, without words to construct reasoning, complex thinking is also made impossible. The poorer the language, the more complex and articulate thinking disappears.

History is full of examples, and many books (Georges Orwell - "1984"; Ray Bradbury - "Fahrenheit 451") have depicted how all totalitarian regimes have always hindered thinking, through a reduction in the number and meaning of words, through the simplification of language.

The problem, however, is that if there are no thoughts, there are no critical thoughts either. And there is no thought without words.

How can hypothetic-deductive thinking be constructed without the conditional? How is it possible to consider the future without a conjugation in the future tense? How is it possible to capture a temporality, a succession of elements in time, whether they are past or future, and their relative duration, without a language that distinguishes between what could have been, what has been, what is, what could be and what will be after what could have happened, has actually happened?

To eliminate a word from the lexicon is not only to eliminate the aesthetics of that word, but also to simplify reality and unintentionally promote more simplified and reductive ideas about the world. From the perspective of neuroscience scholars, it is evident that thought and language are closely related and intertwined in such a way that they receive continuous influences from each other and that both are constantly evolving at both the individual and societal levels.

Benjamin Lee Whorf argues that thought depends on language and that the peculiar structure of a language determines thought and perception of the world. For Jean Piaget, language expresses what is already present in thought, and the level of complexity of both depends on intelligence. In Jerome Seymour Bruner's theory thought and language coincide, simply because language is the means we have available to communicate our thinking.

The importance of language and the complexity of the relationships and mutual influences between intelligence, thought, language, creativity, education, technological supports, and human relationships is such that it constantly attracts the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplines, from neuroscience to the social sciences.

The study focuses on the problem of language impoverishment in developed countries, collecting and discussing evidence and multidisciplinary scientific research, and tries to point out solutions for parents and teachers. Indeed, it is necessary first of all to try to make people speak a language correctly, stimulate reading and push them to write correctly and with language property. Especially if the language is complicated and in particular if it is endangered due to the policies of political homogenization. Because freedom and civilization also depend on this effort.

It is evident how people with little culture and very limited vocabulary have fewer (if any), chances to assert their rights and plead a case in their own favor. This comes convenient to those who benefit from this fact: if you don't understand your rights you don't assert them, if you don't understand a contract they submit to you for signature you are unlikely to refuse to do so.

Knowing how to master one's native language is a key point in being able to express clear concepts, increasing objectivity. Adequate vocabulary allows approaching the description of objective reality. Those who assert the need to simplify orthography, "purify" the language of its "defects" or "archaic" words, abolish genders, tenses, nuances, everything in short that creates complexity, are the real architects of the impoverishment of the human mind.