# Book Review

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The language user in socio-cultural context, specifically for the different cultural background, needs to understand the way of maintaining social interaction among people from those different cultures in social life. **Language and Social Relations** has many interesting topics which can facilitate people from different cultures to maintain good social relation in various activities, either in the national or international arena. The book provides an in-depth study on the role of language in various domains of social life, including identity, gender, class, kinship, deference, status, hierarchy, and others which allow researchers, lecturers, students, and other scholars to  know many valuable information in the language and interdisciplinary linguistic issues. The aim of the book is to explore a theoretical perspective on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on language use in its communicative and interactional settings, particularly on the socioculturally grounded "meanings" and "functions" of linguistic forms.

The book comprises two interesting topics: "language" and "social relations." Agha in his book's agenda on the opening page, stating that "language is not simply a tool of social conduct but the effective means by which human beings formulate models of conduct, and models of conduct serve as points of reference for social behavior, even when actual conduct departs from them," (p.i).

Language is a means of communication and becomes a basic aspect of human social life interaction. People can only share ideas or feelings through language, either verbally or non verbally. As Agha notes, we cannot understand the variety of social relations enactable in social life without coming to grips with the range of reflexive relationships expressible through speech (p. 17). We, therefore, can say that language is significant in our lives, and people cannot maintain good relationship with others without language. May-be because of the vital role of a language in a society, has  inspired Fromkin (2007, 3) to argue that whatever else people do

when they come together – whether they play, fight, make love, or make automobiles – they talk. We live in a world of language. We talk to our friends, our associates, our wives and husbands, our lovers, our teachers, our parents, our rivals, and even our enemies, and everyone responds with more talk.

What is language? Language is most commonly defined as a form of communication that is nonstereotyped and nonfinite; that is, it is learned and creative. By *creative,* we generally mean that language is unlimited in its scope. Speakers of a language are able to produce and interpret an unlimited number of utterances that they have never heardbefore (Crane, et.al, 1981, p.10). Accordingly, Kendall (1998, p.49) argues that language is a set of symbols that express ideas and enable people to think and communicate with one another. As Agha alluded in the opening paragraph of chapter 1 that in every human society has a certain use of language and make palpable highly specific kinds of social effects such as the indication of one's relationship to persons spoken to or spoken about, or the presentation of self as belonging to some identifiable social group, class, occupation or other category of personhood (p.14).

What Is Social Relations? Social relation is one of the main concerns in sociological perspectives. Social interaction is the term used by most of sociologists under the umbrella of microsociology. Social interaction is equivalent with social relation which is frequently used in sociological textbooks. Social interaction is the process by which we act and react in relation to those around us (Giddens, 2001,p.80). Agha mentioned it as highly systematic in each locale for persons who recognize themselves as so related (p.1).

Kendall (1998, p.121) says, on the one hand, that social interaction within a given society has certain shared meanings across situations. On the other hand, people from different cultures or countries have different ways of maintaining interaction. If so, the speakers of different cultures should understand the way of communicating ideas, feeling, and thought to others. Agha argues in the introductory chapter to **Language and Social Relations** that social relations vary across human societies in ways that are limitlessly varied, endlessly susceptible to reanalysis, periodic stabilization and change (p.1).

Through making use of language and social relations, people from different language or culture can understand and distinguish themselves from others. Language allows people to distinguish

themselves from outsiders and maintain group boundaries and solidarity (Farb in Kendall, 1998, p.49). People maintain social relations through a variety of ways, signs, symbols, icons, indexes, and even things. Accordingly, Agha states that social relations can be expressed by all kinds of things – gifts, clothing, cars, handshakes, and land mines.

This book consists of eight chapters, each includes an introduction to pertinent issues related to the topic.  The book presents comprehensive examples and illustrations based upon other studies.

Chapter 1, *Reflexivity*, examines reflexive activity, namely activities in which communicative signs are used to typify other perceivable signs. This chapter discusses metalinguistic activity, some characteristics of metalinguistic activity, and metasemiotic activity. This chapter presents a wide variety of interesting issues which are relevant to discussed topic, among others are text-level indexicality and interactional tropes, reflexive activity in interaction, deixis and representation, performativity, reflexive processes across encounters, and large scale cultural formations. One important discussion in this chapter is the process of communicative transmission. This discussion is very relevant to the title of this book "Language and Social Relations," which states that processes of communicative transmission depend on participant linkages between semiotic events. Such processes can alter the social domain of a cultural regularity through the activities of persons, one participation framework at a time (p.78). In this section, Agha draws our attention that when processes of communicative transmission expand the social domain of a standing-for relationship, a cultural form appears to circulate across a group of people through activities that link them to each other (p.78).

Chapter 2, *From Referring to Registers*. It focuses on: i) *Referring* which discusses the importance of referring in our social lives. In our everyday discourses on meaning, we often talk about referring as if it were a relationship between words and things (p.85). Another important point is concerned with Schegloff's work on locational reference – the activity of referring to locations and places in interactions. Schegloff's study contains location analysis, membership analysis, and topic/activity analysis which enables the linguists or even speakers understand the success of social interaction in the community; ii) Propositional stance and role alignment; iii) Denotational categories; iv) Norms of denotation and interaction; v) Dialect, sociolect, and

denotational footing; and vi) Retrospect and prospect. These topics can color the study of phonology, morphology – syntax (morphosyntax), sociolinguistics, sociology, and other related disciplines.

Chapter 3, *Register formations* which explores many issues of register. In the introductory chapter, the writer enthusiastically presents view of language users, he argues that the language users employ labels like 'polite language,' 'informal speech,' 'upper-class speech,' woman's speech,' literary usage,' 'scientific term,' 'religious language,' 'slang,' and others to describe differences among speech forms (p.145). Such labels determine the origin and status of the two persons who maintain interaction. This chapter therefore elaborates three aspects of registers including metapragmatic stereotypes; stereotypes and socialization; stereotypes and ideology; entextualized tropes; fragmentary circulation; reflexive social process and register models; sociological fractionation and footing; semiotic range; and the enregisterment of style. Agha argues that the language users often formulate essentialistic conceptions of value as 'ideas in the head' and these conceptions often find their way into reports of register phenomena by linguists (p.189).

Chapter 4. *The social life of cultural value* which discusses issues in phonological registers; metadiscourses in accent; the emergence of a standard language (English) which followed by many regional and supra-local varieties; the transformation of habits of speech perception; asymmetries of competence and perception of value; changes in exemplary speaker; and the sedimentation of habits And the inhabitance of agency. One interesting discussion in this chapter is the presence of literary works as one of the three genres of metadiscourse about accent other than popular handbook and penny weeklies. A general effect of literary metadiscourses is to create a memorable cast of fictional characters, whose popularity made the link between accent and social character more widely known (p.214).

Chapter 5 talks about *regrouping identity,* which explores identity,role designators and diacritics, interaction rituals as emblems of group status, emergent, stereotypic and naturalized groupings, enregistered identities and stereotypic emblems. The writer's final discussion in this chapter reveals that the idea of a 'group or persons' cannot be a fundamental (or analytically 'primitive') concept for any social theory. It is a dependent concept, a name for an effect

achieved through semiotic activities, maintained or transformed through such activities, and stabilized for certain purposes, by naturalized diagrams of the social order (p.272).

Chapter 6 confines its investigation on *registers of person deixis*. The writer starts the discussion by presenting the term 'social deixis,' and provides with the study of registers of person deixis. This chapter is therefore followed by metapragmatic stereotypes and standards; emblems of social difference; trooping on norms; and social boundaries. The last sub-chapter, the social boundaries, provides a number of examples of interactional tropes that presuppose the existence of multiple society-internal norms of deictic usage, and themselves consist of the selective observance (whether actual or alleged) of one norm rather than another in order to reformulate a social identity. As an example, Agha quotes Errington's work on stereotypic values of second person polite pronouns in Javanese. Errington observes that in the early twentieth century the rural pronoun *ndika* was already beginning to be displaced in village speech by elite form *sampeyan*. By the logic of self-differentiation, a new term, *panjenengan,* emerged in elite usage at this time and was used increasingly as an alternative to *sampeyan*, effectively replacing it by the 1960s. By the logic of other-appropriation, *sampeyan* had become routine in village usage by the 1960; and by the 1980s *panjenengan* had been assimilated (as a variant) as well. Whereas in the nineteenth century *sampenyan* was an elite form appropriate for equals and superiors, it was by late twentieth century 'stereotypically part of low *basa* usage,' it's usage viewed as indexical of membership in lower-status groups lacking competence in high *basa* registers (p.176).

Chapter 7. *Honorific registers* which confine its discussion on a variety of issues related to honorific register as a reflexive model of pragmatic behavior that selectively associates specific behaviors with stereotypes of honor or respect. The writer gives detail explanations of variation and normalization, in which he explains that language users tend to view the lexical forms of an honorific register as potent symbols of status and politeness, inherently endowed with social meaning. Much of this ideological sense of the inherent power of words is shaped by metapragmatic constructs to which language users are exposed in the ordinary course of language socialization (p.303). This chapter discusses lexeme and text; pronominal repertoires; phonolexical registers of speaker demeanor; register of referent-focal deference; deference to

referent: text-defaults; textual composite effects; social domain; and speech levels. Through various issues in this chapter, the readers hopefully understand the honorific registers which play a vital role in social relations.

Chapter 8. *Norm and trope in kinship behavior*. The last chapter ends the book with various issues in kinship systems, norms, behavior; sign and metasign in kinship behavior; from cultural kinship formation to any cultural formation, such as an understanding of cultural forms allows us to grasp by bringing near a world that is otherwise remote, and the act of grasping them is already an act that intervenes in the world in which these cultural forms (and we) live (p. 385). The writer, therefore, advocates that the study of kinship behavior in this manner, we can formulate a comparative method for the study of kinship that allows us to understand how kinship behavior in one society differs from, or is similar to, such behavior in any other; and how it grows and changes through a process of tropism and normalization in any given society over time (p.383).

The book provides comprehensive discussion and valuable information from some different countries in the scope of linguistics, sociology, anthropology, etc.

I would like to recommend the book to linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, interdisciplinary linguists, lecturers at the universities, teachers at secondary schools, educational practitioners, researchers, students at the universities, and all readers who are interested in the issues of language and society.

This book is suitable for linguistic researchers because it provides methods, frameworks for analyzing many aspects of language, extended discussion of examples from a variety of linguistic and sociohistorical locales, relying on the work of many other researchers.

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**Curriculum Vitae**

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