

Danish University Colleges

Media Language, Clear or Obscure

Ejstrup, Michael; le Fevre Jakobsen, Bjarne

Published in:
International Science Index

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record with the publisher's layout.

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Ejstrup, M., & le Fevre Jakobsen, B. (2015). Media Language, Clear or Obscure. In International Science Index (Vol. 17, pp. 757-762). (International Scholarly and Scientific Research & Innovation). World Academy Of Science, Engineering And Technology.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Download policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Media Language – Clear or Obscure

M. Ejstrup, B. le Fevre Jakobsen

Abstract— Be clear, not obscure. One of the four maxims for optimal communication is that it is essential to develop proficiency in being concise and clear. The question is whether this is really a good idea in all contexts. There is some evidence to the contrary. Undoubtedly, we have many contexts where it is important for mutual understanding that we be clear and concise. This is true of instructions for electronic equipment and for household appliances. Here, linguistic brevity and clarity may be preferable, but not in other cases. Culture, globalization, and the recognition of ever faster growth in diversity, means that media need to be very cognizant of the stringency with which they handle the advice to be linguistically clear and concise. The need to pay great attention to situational awareness is highly visible and intrusive. Attention to situational awareness seems to be crucial for the survival of free speech.

Keywords—Free speech, globalization, linguistic obscurity, situational awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

FOR quite a number of years now, H.P. Grice's *Cooperative Principle* has been a fundamental paradigm for media language. His philosophy has this core in relation to the language's *quantity* and *quality*.

The maxim of quantity:

1. *Make your contribution as informative as required;*
2. *Do not make your contribution more informative than required*

The maxim of quality:

1. *Do not say what you believe to be false;*
2. *Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.*

(Quotation from Mey, 1993: 65)

This article will discuss whether this paradigm is still valid in current media language, in the balance between 'Clear' and 'Obscure'.

II. THE INTERPERSONAL CONTEXT AND METAFUNCTION

'Clear or Obscure' in 'Media Language' ought to be considered from the contexts within which media language is set. Language constitutes itself exactly from the interpretive framework within which it is set and comprehended, and its interpersonal metafunctions focus on mechanisms in the linguistic interaction between people. Language is a resource for establishing relations, including intersubjectivity in the exchange of information between sender and receiver, or the lack thereof. Through language interaction, we create and

maintain social relations with those people that we want to reach with our message, with the media as a multichannel phenomenon. According to the linguist M.A.K. Halliday, there are, fundamentally, certain types of interpersonal meaning in every communication situation when one wishes to be 'Clear', viz.:

- I. What is the sender's (and thereby, receiver's) role in the communication?
- II. What is exchanged between sender and receiver?

Regarding (I), one can play one of two roles. One can either be the giver or the requester regarding (II) with the aim of either giving or requesting some sort of message, and one can exchange information, or things and services, i.e. four expressive functions.

In connection with being 'Clear', language as a resource has a number of well-defined expressive functions that can be designated 'proposal' for 'offer' and 'invitation' and 'proposition' for 'statement' and 'question'. These definitions are semantically motivated and see language from above, based on a philosophy that the exchange of information succeeds best through intention and collaboration. Hence, by analyzing a certain amount of language data, we can fairly accurately measure whether the exchange of information has been successful. The language data dominate in meaning over the context, while for 'obscure' it is precisely the opposite. Only analyses of context can lead us to understanding what is really behind the blurred message, and whether it really was appropriate, and the intention, to express oneself in that way.

We also find in the 'obscure' language, three kinds of meaning that are simultaneously realized with an *experiential*, an *interpersonal* and a *textual* semiotic system. The aspects distinguish themselves, by being precisely a set of choices in a culturally anchored semiotic context system, which falls apart when there are too many information gaps, such as, for example, between parallel societies. One hides behind the 'obscure', because one is afraid of the consequences. A novel can, as a proposition, tell a story; a drama can outline conflicts; a philosophical text can discuss existential questions or impose a proscribed interpretation; a text book can present new knowledge; a journalistic text can deliver news from the big wide world etc. Some genres encompass, have encompassed, and potentially will encompass, more dynamite in those parts of the world where diversity and tolerance is not lauded, but are set in a particular existential philosophy promoted by a

prohibition of several hundred years against the printed word. The knowledge of generations has been lost because it has not been passed on. Much has been attempted to limit the exercising of language resources and choices, but this appears to be getting more difficult, in line with the developments in technology. On the other hand, propositions are developed to blur, but that nonetheless, elucidate the experiential message. Few people still claim that the earth is flat, or the centre of the universe, but their numbers are hardly likely to increase. Others seek the future in past conditions, but history has long revealed that those who seek their future in the past have no future.

Both 'clear' and 'obscure' language are, as mentioned, a semiotic, where the amount of information is created through potentials in the understanding of realized as well as blurred messages in a given context. By excluding a clear form of expression in the proposition, other symbols supplant content – this could be, for example, forms of dress, items of dress, hairstyle choice, use of makeup etc. With 'clear' language, the message is transformed to an amount of information, while with 'obscure' language, it ends in an information potential that demands a deeper insight for interpretation. The balance between an experiential (experience exchange), an interpersonal (between individuals), and/or a textual proposition, results in a series of semantic dimensions and language layers in which one can orient oneself, and state what 'clear' and 'obscure' language draws upon in a given context. This can be illustrated by the following strata:

- (i) Phonology/graphology
- (ii) Lexico-grammar
- (iii) Semantic
- (iv) Context

III. THE RELATIONS OF THE STRATA

The central stratum in 'clear' and an 'obscure' media language is lexico-grammar, the engine room of media language, in which one of the two of language's content strata is found. Lexico-grammar constitutes both 'clear' and 'obscure' language's resource to 'put into words, i.e. to express or underplay the semantic propositions that are realized through the grammatical structure and lexis (word choice) of any language. When blurring or underplaying lexis occurs, semantic gaps, the language potentials are circumscribed and symbols or implied contexts take over, and this is a much more dangerous, self-limiting form of interaction. Lexico-grammar leads naturally over into the semantic stratum – the second of language's content stratum. The semantic is the 'heart' of media language, 'the pumping station' – a large 'heart' gives many semantic propositions and meaning resources.

The semantic media stratum connects lexico-grammar and the context, which is why the semantic propositions are primarily impinged upon by the demands that contextual factors place upon putting words to extra-linguistic realities. Hence, one must have insight in order to understand. And it is precisely here that inappropriate gaps in our media language can be found that either cannot keep pace, are not allowed to be filled out, or are consciously suppressed.

Context's meta-linguistic make-up is constituted by the global and local surroundings as a whole, i.e. the situation (situational context) in which 'clear' and 'obscure' media language must be able to function or fail because of a lack of resources to understand the propositions. Three variables have an influence on the extent of semantic downplaying in the situational context, namely the following, as set out by Eggins ((1996): 36)

- (v) Field (= subject choice)
- (vi) Tenor (= relation between sender and receiver)
- (vii) Mode (=mode of communication)

Similarly, these three constitute the choice of metaphoric and thus triggered connotations. Field focuses on a social and cultural proposition around a language interaction and in the choice of topics. In many media contexts, a subject such as religious existential philosophy is defined as blasphemy, and tied up with bans and edicts. Here, very many blurred expressions can be found. Field similarly includes those activities which fill out a subject with semantic meaning between interacting parties or make them relevant for everyone. Hence, Field focuses on everything that is communicated or the absence thereof.

Tenor puts the relations between sender and receiver in the centre, with interaction propositions for the interacting parties through defining their role functions and relations in a social and cultural perspective. There could be permanent characteristics for all the interacting parties or relations that are created between them in a specific situation. Tenor thus focuses on all the relations that the interacting parties have with one another. In the Danish educational system, the 'open ended' discussions is fundamental for everyone, while a religion philosopher's interpretation of ban/edict, in many cultures, circumscribes the interaction proposition for the receiver.

Mode marks the role of media language in the proposition between sender and receiver, as Mode is a variable for language potentials and special status in the given situational context. Put another way, how language as an entity is used in a given situational context is put under the microscope. The internet encompasses many Modes (for example, text, sound, music, picture, video, etc.), which is why the net is considered to be dangerous by many people globally, as it is exactly here that it is not possible to issue a global ban/edict. The sending Tenor can no longer be totally dominant but must accept semantic propositions directly or indirectly, for example, through an extension of the interaction on social networks.

The three contextual variables are the central situational factors that represent the social context as semiotic resources in which 'clear' and 'obscure' media language encompass the propositional intentions and aims. The contextual variables realize the semantic and the lexico-grammar stratum. Field has its linguistic counterpart in the experiential metafunction, Tenor, in the interpersonal metafunction, and Mode, in the textual metafunction. The first mentioned two metafunctions, express experience and intersubjective interpretation hereof, i.e. areas that we need to put words to. Missing words trigger semantic interpretation potentials, the consequence of which is that we never manage to formulate content, for example,

through a text or expression. All levels have thus significance for which entities can be drawn upon when we need to articulate a given content or an attitude in the media.

IV. SOME RECENT EXAMPLES

A number of different cultural and social situational contexts can illustrate these relations more fully in relation to semantic propositions.

In a Danish media context, how a 'clear' proposition can have wide-ranging consequences, has been marked out. In connection with the premature death of a 16-year-old boy (Jørgen), in a road accident, studio anchor, Adam Holm, discusses the relationship between knowledge and faith, in his column, 'Den guddummelige tragedie' (The Dumbvine Tragedy – *play on the Danish words, dumb and divine*) in the daily newspaper, 'Politiken'. He writes:

The explanations of the faithful of God's miraculous intervention and punishment of the presumptuous, are, mildly put, confusing. When 15 schoolgirls were burned to death in 2002, in a school in Mecca, an Imam referred to Allah's anger over the 'licentious' state of the school; and the religious police, who had failed to let the frightened girls leave the school's ground, because they were not dressed as prescribed, received words of acknowledgement. There were no popular protests against this Wahhabi nonsense.

When people of faith thank their god for 'saving' them in a situation of grave danger, it is considered natural. God takes the lives of the presumptuous and protects the pious. Comforting thoughts, but 16-year-old Jørgen, was not guilty of blasphemy or of living a licentious life. But he died just the same. The hurricane in the southern US, the school fire in Saudi-Arabia, and a fatal road accident in Norway, must have a rational explanation. This kind of thing has a methodology.

Religion does not have this, and this is apparently enticing for those who desire mysticism and seek the unjustifiable. One has to be unusually besotted with science fiction to be convinced that the Ten Commandments were delivered on stone tablets to Moses by the great builder of worlds and planets himself.

(Politiken, 12 May 2013)

Adam Holm expresses himself unambiguously 'clear' on his atheist proposition, but this has had major consequences. He was suspended by Danmarks Radio (Danish State Radio), even though he had written the essay as a private person and not with his 'media journalist' hat on. The Union of Journalists took up the case, but it was first after lengthy negotiations that he was re-instated. If he had been 'obscure' in his media proposition then things would probably have been very different.

Art can express and illustrate semantic propositions that are difficult to define through language alone. In Denmark and Germany, for example, the young poet, Yahya Hassan (born Aarhus, 19 May 1995) of Palestinian background, caused a furore. Hassan critically examines his upbringing, which was

marked by violence, neglect, and criminality. He puts words to taboo 'fields' against a Muslim cultural background, and puts into words his conceptualizations on social fraud, violence against children, and the lack of integration in Danish society, all intertwined with religious dogma. As 'tenor' Hassan triggered emotions 'for' and 'against'. Some people feel validated, while others are sceptical or become angry, as religion, to them, is dogma and is not subject to discussion.

When he gives readings of his poems, this 'mode' triggers bedlam, and he must be protected by an extensive security operation. He receives death threats and is assaulted in Copenhagen's main railway station, and in Palestine. The experiential semantic complexity, in religious existential philosophies, is filled in by Hassan with words, in such a way that they have great interpersonal impact, but with wildly different effects. The poetic language codes (textual metafunction) open up, precisely for the many controversial interpretations and identification methods, and in this connection, Hassan states in an interview with Berlingske Tidende:

I am not on an errand to criticize Islam. My criticism is more a criticism of religion. Those things I criticize Islam for: religious indoctrination, intransigence, and a patent on the truth, are fundamental to all religions. (...)

Previously, this here was local and family business which affected only me and my immediate circle. Then it turned into a public event and then the reactions became violent.

(Berlingske e-newspaper: 7 June 2014)

Yahya Hassan's poems, with their transformational metaphorical and semantic consequences, display that it demands courage to stand up against these kinds of Fields, Tenors and Modes.

Media language, as a form of interaction, is constantly developing and incorporating new semantic Fields, experiences, and interpretations of the world. But the fast growing media realities and the increasing number of immigrants, for example, into Europe, has currently resulted in normal, organic development being in an imbalance, in which culture areas that were previously homogenous, have ended in multicultural sub-segments. The result is semantic gaps at all linguistic levels; theoretical, methodological, and practical. Our cognition has quite simply been unable to meet the furious tempo of the developments, or these developments have been denied, and people have instead retreated into a time long past, where things were comprehensible but that are completely incapable of encompassing the realities of the modern world. Both conditions mean that an analysis of the Field, Tenor and Mode of certain functions, and associated communicative metafunctions, clearly indicate that we must either keep quiet and accept that certain fields are taboo, or we must develop a number of semantic slots that can be applied to the great and the small.

V. CLEAR ENOUGH

H. P. Grice sets out the cooperative principle as general for all language interaction, and to this, adds the four maxims. One of them directs us to be brief and clear in word choice and syntax when we express ourselves through language. Others direct us to be truthful, keep strictly to what we know, and to be relevant. Are these appropriate in all situations? The answer must be 'hardly' when we are dealing with mass communications through the media, which must communicate news, reportage, and portraits from an extremely diverse and globalized world that has a multitude of cultural norms and bonds.

Language is a unique and essential part of being human and we do not know of individuals or human cultures that do not possess language. Whether it is sound or sign based, the ability to express oneself is always there. Freedom of expression is a subset, and at all times and in all societies, there have been limitations on the degree of this freedom. Subjects, words, categorizations, and, in particular, ways of expressing oneself, can regularly end up on the blacklist. Expressing oneself, where there is no law to forbid it, is no guarantee against sanctions. This can be seen when a right-wing politician is assaulted in the street, and a Danish cartoonist in his own home. Both of them have expressed themselves on subjects one is quite entitled to, according to Danish law, but which groups in Danish society refuse to accept.

The ambiguity of symbols and cultural dependence plays a major role here. With an outset in the theoretical disciplines of the science of linguistics, examples are given of both language forms and functions, which will be of significance for how to, or how not to, express oneself. From the smallest unit of language (almost) without real content, to the major linkages of (picture) universes, created by language, situations can arise, where clear, relevant, and concise formulations are in danger of not being employed without fear of sanction.

Language is both genetically and socially constructed; in how great amounts each of these contributes has always been debated by science, and often these debates seem to have created more problems than they have solved. All languages allow us to articulate anything we wish, but we do not do it - just like that. The rules on how we may express ourselves within a particular culture are just as different as our languages are different. Some languages lack quite simple and common words for phenomena and concepts we do not accept should be mentioned in a particular period; for example, we have never had a commonly used Danish word for *pedophile*, or, in fact, a more specific word for the love of a man for a child. There could be several reasons for this, but there is no doubt that one of them is that the subject is surrounded by taboo, and that we would rather not come into too close contact with its mention. And as language is a social community that people share, it is difficult, if not impossible, to introduce generally accepted and simple words that refer to phenomena and acts in these taboo subjects. For example, in Denmark today, it is often wise to euphemistically say that someone is *of another ethnic background than Danish*, instead of *dark-skinned, brown, or*

second-generation immigrant. To the same extent, in many Western cultures, we have since the Second World War had restrictions for which connection words such as *Jew, Jewish, gas, annihilation* and other common words may be combined. For example, in post-war Germany, many people were horrified when the trams in one of the larger towns carried an advert with the slogan '*Gas spart Geld*'. (Gas saves money). A brief, relevant, and clear message. But it is not what one says, but the way it is said and the context in which it is said that are crucial for whether the formulation can be accepted at that point in time, and by the society in which it is expressed. And the fact that it is brief and concise is no guarantee that the language act is optimal; now as before.

In the autumn of 2012, the same issue appeared again when a picture of 'Jewcakes' from Karen Volf, was shown on the internet in an advert for the Coop, with the text, '*Jew cakes, baked in a gas oven. Merry Xmas. 250 grams 23.95*'. A very brief and concise caption; '*Here there are no superficial ingredients*' and the text relates to precise details in the product; H. P. Grice's maxims appear to have been met. Subsequently however the caption caused huge indignation on social networks because of the inappropriate wording and a poorly concealed reference to the Holocaust. Bisca, the Danish producer of the biscuits were not slow to announce that the company were sorry about the picture and text, and the director of innovation, stated to the Danish electronic media ekstrabladet.dk:

This is an unpleasant and grim case which can have major consequences for us. 'Jew cakes' is a Danish product which is particularly popular at Christmas, and as a result our sales could be hard hit, if our product is connected with so inappropriate a message.

In the same connection, a representative for the supermarket chain, COOP, stated to ekstrabladet.dk, that he had investigated the case and he considered the picture and the text were forgeries, but that nonetheless he had impressed upon the stores that such a sign would, of course, be inappropriate and thus, unacceptable.

VI. LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

The functionalist approach to language description outlines both *that* we perform language acts, and *how* we perform these acts when we communicate with each other. Basically it has the following four aims:

- Indicative (to describe how we think the world actually is)
- Imperative (to get the world to be as we want it to be)
- Interrogative investigation (to inquire how others think the world is)
- Optative construction (to set out thoughts on desired worlds)

We can communicate about anything with all our different languages; real and unreal, in and outside the situation, and, in the majority of cases, there seems to be a degree of proximity between thought and language. This proximity we often

experience and accept without, in any way, knowing or thinking any more about it. At other times there can be a breakdown in language communication precisely because the subject or the commentary is not clearly expressed, and the connection between language (act), and thought, becomes unclear and disappears. It is here that one of language's areas of conflict clearly appears, because how close to reality and how briefly and clearly is it acceptable to express oneself. Actually, there ought not to be any obstacles to saying things as directly as the language technically allows, but there are. And the greater the understanding of, and diligence shown, regarding staying on the accepted side of an often informal and unwritten norm for what a society accepts, the greater the chance for successfully getting away with almost any kind of expression. One example could be that the debate and the possibilities of expression found a more positive and less heated plateau when, in the course of 2012, Danes went from discussing a special marriage service for homosexuals and lesbians to discussing a *gender neutral marriage service*. The words *homosexual* and *lesbian* were removed from the church's *marriage ceremony*, which gave another balance in the choice of language related to the issue. As a result, the debate gained another 'framing' and the language became less precise and the tone and momentum in the debate changed and became more positive, even though the basis for the debate was, and is, the same.

The meaning of language, and the framing which produces it, is difficult to get a grip of. Linguists have worked on it for several hundred years without any great success, and several times an attempt has been made to work out a description with a *formal semantic* which is an artificially arranged world that builds upon logic, quite like we know it from, for example, the worlds of mathematics and Aristotelian syllogisms. In particular, since we allocated major attention to electronic data processing, the significance of formal semantics has grown. The human brain and language are hardly likely to be constructed on mathematics' minimalistic systems, and natural language fits badly with data processing which reveals that much more is embedded than an objective communicating of the truth when language is employed as a window between different worlds and the perception of these worlds – *how does what is out there get into our heads, and how does what we have in our heads, influence what is out there, when it comes out as language*. Here, logic and its minimalistic nature, fall short. Ordinary usage, such as metonymy and metaphoric, is the way humans create understanding of phenomena which they would otherwise not understand.

Here we arrive at the exciting and controversial area *use of language*. We are moving into an area in which limitations pile up, because it is decidedly neither accepted nor safe to use language and to create pictures as one likes. We reach a point where, with language, we can undertake acts which are actually unlawful, such as when someone makes defamatory statements about others in society. Here, use of language is potentially something we cannot accept, and which can be rather dangerous.

For example, in 1989, in a Danish provincial newspaper, (*Ringkjøbing Amts Dagblad*), among other places, Emmy

Fromsgaard could state, concisely and clearly, and without any apparent problems, 'gay sex is the worst form of whoredom', and many fundamental Christians were seemingly in agreement with her. Today, such a statement would hardly be accepted, and one might even speculate that it would be looked at by the justice system, because it contains an insult of a minority. Not that this form of content cannot be found in expressions in 2015, but they must be expressed differently. The use of language must be different to be able relate without constraint to the same subject(s). Complete biblical quotes and references to the Old Testament are seen used when the same attitudes to the same subject are brought forth. Relevant references and precision in the language must be done differently; direct references to words and thoughts, anno 2015, must be made more obscure, i.e. they must be led by words and text that are accepted in another time and culture. Danes feel that they have freedom of expression, but words are less free; greater consideration and artifice are demanded in 2015. Danish, like all other languages, has changed in relation to pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, in the course of these almost 25 years, but the limit to what is acceptable language on homosexuality has changed even more, and even more quickly, as part of our general cultural development and new insights. The mood and level of abstraction are crucial to what statements we will accept as a society.

VII. CATEGORIZATION

The world's various languages place different weight on meaning. Something which certain languages force their speakers to express because the phenomena are compulsory elements of the grammar are, in other languages, optional; that is to say, that some languages force speakers to consider elements of meaning that are optional in other languages. For example, the polite pronouns in Danish and English, where English has completely lost the polite forms of You, while Danish has retained them as, *De*, *Dem*, and *Deres*. In Danish however, language developments have meant that the grammatical polite forms have almost gained reverse signs in relation to language use of earlier centuries. Evidentialis (von hörensagen) is a grammatical form, for example, in Turkish past tense verbs. In Turkish, *onu öldürdü* – *he (or she) has killed him (or her)* – means, I have witnessed it myself! While *onu öldürmüştü* betyder – *he (or she) has killed him (or her)* – I have been told that and have not actually witnessed it myself. The example shows that, in Turkish, one is forced to state whether you have experienced an event or have just been told about it, while it is not necessary to state whether the agent is male or female. In Danish, the obverse is the case in both regards. These grammatical bound forms can be crucial for how calamitous it might be to express oneself concisely on controversial subjects. A third example is conceptions (unreal worlds) in Danish and French, where we, in Danish, do not distinguish the unreal from the real in expressions such as, for example, *we could make drawings of him* (something real in the past or something imagined that is only found unreal). In French, one must distinguish between *on pouvait faire des dessins de lui* (real

possibility in a real world in past tense) and *on pourrait faire des dessins de lui* (the imagined possibility in an unreal world). All these examples show that the obligatory grammatical forms in individual languages, set limitations for how ingenious and deliberately unclear language users can express themselves. And undoubtedly, in these obligatory forms, dangers and traps can be lie in wait in relation to how imprecisely one can possibly express oneself. Great care and ingenuity is needed to be able to say anything about controversial subjects. Differences and dangers are specific to language and culture. It is particularly dangerous when translating from one language to another. In a globalized world, it is the rule rather than the exception that we obtain knowledge of crises and dangers from other cultures with other languages, and thus categorizations and grammatical imperatives than our own Danish, and, as previously mentioned, this can be dangerous when translating from one language to another; and perhaps even back again. The language specific categorizations and grammatical dictates gain major significance for how languages user can twist things and ingeniously express themselves on controversial subjects, with appropriate ambiguity, exactitude, and implication, which exactly their language allows, so the meaning is made clear without causing (too much) upset. For example, the definite noun form is obligatory in Danish, and it is extremely important which of the following forms is used: (*en kirke*, (a church) *kirken* (the church), (*en*) *G/gud* (a god), *G/guden* (God), (*en*) *himmel* (a heaven), *himlen* (heaven) etc. and the inflection of each word and expression is crucial for both denotation and connotation in Danish, while, in Turkish, pretty much every form of the nominate is optional. For example, Lars Hedegaard stated in an interview, in 2009:

They [Muslims, ed.] rape their own children. One hears it all the time. Girls in Muslim families are raped by their uncles, their cousins, or their fathers.

Lars Hedegaard is not directly explicit about whether he means *some* or *all*, Muslims, and in Danish we use the inflected form of the definite singular (for example, *løven er et farligt dyr* (The lion is a dangerous animal) or indefinite plural (f.eks. *løver er farlige dyr* (lions are dangerous animals) to say something *generic*, i.e. something general that applies to everyone in a group. If Lars Hedegaard had elected to say explicitly *nogle* (some) instead of just *girls, families, uncles, and cousins* in indefinite plural without specifier, the case might have taken another course. On 20th April 2012, *Jyllands-Posten* could have added *some* in parenthesis instead of writing just *Muslims* without specifier, but not without crucially changing the meaning. These examples show that in any language one can get away, more or less successfully, with formulations that would hardly be accepted in another language; there are words and expressions that could create real dangers and problems in a translation. A translation from a Danish court report to Turkish could be fatal depending on whether the translation of *he killed him* becomes, that the witness testified *onu öldürdü* or *onu öldürmüs*.

In the languages of the world, it is common on the meaning side, to have prototypical representatives for categories; a kind of middle level with words such as *table, chair, hammer, saw,*

red and blue. Above these words, there is a level of words we call *hypernyms* – *furniture, tools and colours*. while the much more specific and special words and terms lie at a level under the middle level and are called *hyponyms* – *stool, camping stool, jigsaw, roofing hammer, light lilac and off-white*. The divisions are culture specific, and here language users have rich opportunities to twist things in relation to the specificity of the individual language, when they move into controversial areas. Language function in the form of categorization and the creation of context, contributes to bringing system to chaos. This chaos, language forms a part of, while simultaneously helping to lead us around in it. Language, in itself, is a constituent part of society and of culture, and although words in a democracy can appear to be free, almost as a consequence of their inherent power, one moment they acquire the desired potency, the next, scathing contempt.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eggins, S (1996): *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Pinter
- [2] Ejstrup, M (2012). *Grundbog i sprog*. København: Gyldendal.
- [3] Ejstrup, M & le Fevre Jakobsen, B. (2011) *Takt og tale og tv-avis gennem 40 år*. In Forandringens journalistik 40 års tilbageblik. Red. Buch R. Aarhus: Ajour. pp. 40-72.
- [4] Ejstrup, M. (2009). *Sproglig mangfoldighed længe leve*. Det rum[me]lige sprog. København: Dansklærerforeningen. pp. 55-74..
- [5] Grice, H. P. (1975). *Logic and conversation*. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan. Eds. *Syntax and Semantics, Vol. 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press; pp 41-57.
- [6] Husted, J. (1982): *Austin og Searle. Talehandlinger*. In P. Lübke. Red. *Vor tids filosofi: Videnskab og sprog*. København: Politiken. pp. 240-47.
- [7] Mey, J.L. (1993). *Pragmatics. An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell..
- [8] Skautrup, P. (1976) *Dansk sprog og kultur; Udvalgte afhandlinger og artikler 1921-1971*. København: Gyldendal. Nordisk Forlag.
- [9] Skautrup, P. (1968) *Det Danske Sprogs Historie, IV*. København: Gyldendal. Nordisk Forlag.