

Chapter 52

A Semantic Approach to LinkedIn Profiles: Critical Analysis and Insights

Ilias Kapareliotis

Abertay Dundee University, UK

Patricia Crosbie

Abertay Dundee University, UK

ABSTRACT

Language is essential in allowing us to analyze and make sense of our everyday lives. The development and increased use of social media now means that the way language is structured online can facilitate communication; however, it can also hinder communication. This chapter examines LinkedIn as an example of an online platform which uses verbal and visual linguistic expressions to aid communication. A number of linguistic theories and their impact on LinkedIn as a social media platform are examined. LinkedIn, and its use of user profiles, has been chosen over other social media because it encapsulates the majority of theories presented. The theories are strongly linked to the linguistic background appropriate for the online environment and recommendations and discussions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of theories and debates about the origin of language. For example, during the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed the existence of language resulted from natural laws. Other philosophers believed that the human need for communication lead to the creation and evolution of language. This belief was based on a particular approach to evolution and human development.

Some schools of thought adopted the Darwinian theory of evolution which suggests language developed as part of the human evolutionary process. However, even in contemporary society, most theories trying to explain language and its functions support the descriptive narrative. Niemitz (2004), however, rejects both these theories for a number of different reasons. For example, he argues the different theories supporting linguistic evolution of human beings are based mainly on the effort to:

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1. Explain the origin of language.
2. Explain the origin of life.
3. Explain the origin of human species, and
4. Explain the origin of language along with other symbolic forms.

Jean Piaget supported the theory that linguistic and other human abilities are features of self-organisation and that the evolutionary process has been supported by the development of language. This theory describes the dynamics of language, human evolution and human life in general. However, no matter what theory or approach is adopted there is general agreement that the systems leading to evolution are highly sophisticated and are, by nature, autonomous. The main issue that has to be explored, as language evolves, is the stability of the system and the interaction between the system, society and each individual human being. In addition, the complexity language imposes means there are other important considerations such as the changing nature of complexity itself, the barriers complexity creates and the possible risks the nature of the complexity creates. The LinkedIn community or society, as it evolves day by day, adopts structures and cultural approaches based on the above theories, but they have developed in a different manner. For example, the professional and visual nature of the LinkedIn society has tended to create an efficient and contemporary language based on:

1. Professional needs
2. Social needs
3. Sophistication of the actual online environment which is greater than the one that Facebook or other similar networks are offering to their users.

All the above considerations stem from social coexistence and evolutionary approaches which do not depend on the era and the verbal code in which the users are operating or have adopted. However, comparative behavioural research

reveals that many cognitive and communicative skills were pre-existing and thus contributed to the emergence of language. Contemporary neuroscience also questions Darwin's evolutionary theory which proposes that at the initial stages of evolution and language development human beings initially used signal calls and then eventually language developed or evolved. LinkedIn uses almost the same approach demonstrating that the evolution of the human being and society has to be at the focus any type of electronic activity especially when different linguistic approaches are used. Modern biology also supports the theory that evolutionary change, in terms of language, is dependant on cultural reforms and belonging. Both mean that Darwin's theory should not be absolutely accepted when trying to explain the different skills and knowledge that humans develop when adopting certain communication patterns or approaches.

In addition, the relationship between semiotics and the development of language is under researched which means its impact on the development of language is not fully understood. Darwin proposed language evolved according to the language of the sexual partner's language or according to the language of the family group. However, this is not the full picture because the impact of semiotics was not considered by Darwin. Understanding of the evolution of language and linguistic aptitudes has developed since the 18th Century and, because there have been no studies of human beings who do not possess any linguistic abilities, Darwin's hypotheses must be considered incomplete. It is also possible that there are a number of genetic factors which will affect the mature language capacity and which will have an impact on the language a child acquires through being a member of a particular social group or family. (Szathmary, 2006). An additional theory was proposed in 18th century by the French philosopher Rousseau who supported the view that language developed as interest in music and the arts developed.

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