

대학원생 논문 발표 _ 2분과 교육2-1

God, You, and Me: The Communal and Communicative Nature and Purpose of Language

Deolito Vender Vistar, Jr. (고신대학교 Th. M.)

Introduction

When you are talking with your friend or spouse, do you listen to what he/she is saying or are you paying more attention to the accuracy of his/her grammar or pronunciation? I caught myself doing the latter one day when I was talking to my wife, both of us being non-native English speakers and yet using English to communicate at home, she being a Chinese and I a Filipino. She was saying a crucial point to me, when one slight mistake in her pronunciation caught my attention and this “slight” mistake actually caused me to miss her point altogether. After apologizing, I asked her to restate herself.

I surmise this problem can take place not among native speakers but among ESL/EFL speakers. Non-native English speakers can be so scrupulous about verbal accuracy to the extent that we miss the fact that language is primarily for purposes of communication. This commitment to accuracy, which is good, unfortunately turns off people from actually speaking the language for fear of speaking it inaccurately! I asked a Korean middle school student: “Do you try to speak English at school, say, to your classmates and friends?” He confessed “no,” saying that he is afraid of making mistakes and eventually losing face in front of his peers. I assured him that it is alright to make mistakes because, after all, he is not a native speaker of that language. But I do understand this boy’s plight, which is commonplace here in Korea. His fear is not self-inflicted; it is caused by a society that has missed the purpose of language learning and acquisition. There is no wonder that the best way to acquire English is by immersion—the learner should live in an English speaking community, where the drive for verbal accuracy is not as highly emphasized and where English is spoken for the primary purpose of interpersonal communication—to understand and be understood.

A Korean friend told me that he can travel the whole world with only one English sentence pattern: “I want.” He said that he can very well manage to communicate by simply adding a few words to “I want”: “I want this”; “I want that”; “I want to eat”; “I want food”; “I want to go shopping”; and so forth. That sounds funny but true. Where there is mutual understanding, there is communication. Forget about verbal accuracy! I know quite a number of

Korean friends whose capital in English speaking is “confidence.” They speak English confidently and, so, fluently. Never mind the verbal accuracy.

There is a fundamental difference between native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Native speakers learn English through the “speaking environment”—family and friends speaking English. Then later in school they are introduced to the formalities of the English language—like the eight parts of speech, figures of speech, grammar, and the like. In contrast, non-native English speakers’ usual first exposure to the English language is in formal classroom setup, where the instructor, maybe talking in the local language or dialect, instructs the learners about the basics of the English language. You see, the non-native English speaker first learns the formalities of the English language rather than acquires the language itself. An old friend called this “language learning” versus “language acquisition.” Learning about the language is not quite the same as learning the language itself.

These insights lead us to the question of the nature of language understood from the perspective of the Bible. This paper argues that language is a communicative enterprise among three parties: God, you, and me. The vertical aspect of it is that God employs language to commune with us humans, and He has done so through His messengers—prophets and apostles whose God-inspired words (2 Tim. 3:16 & 2 Pet 1:20–21) are now inscribed in the Bible. This fact presupposes that God has gifted humans with the capacity to communicate primarily via language. The God-human community is a two-way street in that humans respond to God in the unspoken word of the heart and the spoken words of the mouth (Romans 10:9, 10). The horizontal aspect of it is the communication and community that God has intended for human beings. In this paper, language is seen as God’s gift for humanity and that it must be exercised with accountability and responsibility.

This paper seeks to advance three crucial points about language: (1) the telos of language is communion through communication; (2) there is the vertical communion between God and mankind; and (3) there is also the horizontal communion between and among human beings. This paper will conclude with a call to a responsible use of language.

1. Language’s telos: Communion through Communication

What is the intended end or purpose for language? This question raises a prior question: Who intends or determines this end or purpose? Can we really find the intended end or purpose of language without first pinning down its rightful origins?

These days it is not uncommon to find literature that attributes language origins and telos to simple human ingenuity or to the impersonal force of evolution. Such a matter of course does

not offer any meaningful answer the questions at hand. This is exemplified in Jean Aitchison's *The seeds of speech: Language origin and evolution*. She calls myth the Genesis account of human creation and the Tower of Babel phenomenon. Espousing Darwin's theory of natural selection, she thinks that humans "were products of evolution" (p. 53). To her, modern human language evolved over time, "perhaps around 100,000 years ago" (p. 63). Notice the way she puts the question: "For what purpose did language develop?" (p. 17). The choice of the word "develop" is intentional, for it purposefully leaves out the question of language-creator. What she offers as answers are not really answers, for she only cites the functions of language, instead of uncovering the very telos for which language exists. Instead of talking about the purpose of language, she only talks about the functions of language, hence begging the question. After reading Aitchison's book, one gets the sense that language is nothing more than an inevitable product of human evolution, albeit a beneficial one, and there is almost no reason to look for the future of language besides the point of expediency.

A better alternative to Aitchison's question is: "For what purpose was language created?" Like in Aitchison's question, the choice of the word "created" is intentional, for it brings into the discussion the idea of language's createdness and that of creator. Where the evolutionary worldview fails to give satisfying answers, the Bible provides a better and, in fact, the only satisfying alternative.

God is a communal being, as is presupposed by His triune nature. In the divine mystery of the Godhead, the distinct persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit partake in a perfect and eternal communion. It is hard to think of this communion apart from the idea that the three divine persons of the Godhead eternally and perfectly communicate with one another. In T. F. Torrance's words, God in His own eternal essence "is not mute or dumb, but Word communicating or speaking himself" (Quoted in Thompson, 2006, p. 64).

The Bible presents God as a speaking, communicating God. "God's capacity for speech is treated as self-evident and operates as one of the most basic and influential assumptions in Scripture," writes M. D. Thomson (2006, p. 60). The big question is, exactly what is meant by the claim that God speaks? Should it be taken literally (*viz.*, God speaks audibly) or metaphorically (as an anthropomorphic language)? The answer is both. God is limitless, and He surely is capable of speaking audibly, in human language. Has He done so? Let us consider Deuteronomy 4:11-12, recounted by Moses in the hearing of the second-generation Israelites: You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.

The thrust of this passage is to instruct the Israelites not to slip into idolatry; hence the

emphasis: the Lord was heard but not seen. Thompson (2006, p. 61) rightly observes that there are no literary markers in this passage that would call for a metaphorical interpretation. Verse 12 has the word “heard”: The Israelites heard the “sound” (NIV; lit. “voice,” Christensen, 1991, p. 86) of words. Hence, literally: “The Israelites heard the voice of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Wright, 1996, p. 50). The text does not actually say that the Israelites heard Yahweh’s audible voice; rather, it affirms that they heard the “voice of Yahweh’s words,” and those words are none other than the Ten Commandments, which is the subject of Deuteronomy 5. Unmistakably, Yahweh’s communication with the Israelites took on a verbal format in the Ten Commandments. We expect this to have been written in the language of the Jews. Though the above text does not clearly say that Yahweh spoke audibly to Israel, the more important point is that Yahweh’s communication with Israel was via the verbal language, the Ten Commandments.

In the New Testament, three occurrences of God’s speaking from heaven are reported, all associated with Jesus. During Jesus’ baptism, Matthew reports that a voice from heaven was heard, saying: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (3:17). The second instance, also reported by Matthew, took place on the mount of transfiguration, when a voice from the cloud said: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (17:5b). The third instance is reported by John and took place days before the crucifixion. The Father confirmed to Jesus that he has glorified his name thus far and will glorify it yet again: “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again” (12:28b).

Still another instance of the divine communicating through human language is the risen Christ’s encounter with Saul recorded in Acts 9. Luke reports that Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (v. 4). Saul asked: “Who are you, Sir?” That same voice spoke: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (v. 5). It is a heart-moving scene, for the risen Christ, ascended to the right hand of the Father, carried on a conversation with a human, in human words!

There we have it: God speaks. Reflecting that, we humans speak, too, and the telos of that speaking is communion. Jensen (2002, p. 89) describes words as a “wonderfully fitting instrument of fellowship.” Language affords us a kind of relating that yields “personal knowledge” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 205) or “inter-subjective bonds between speakers” (p. 206). When coming from a faithful source, words “are entirely trustworthy and cause faith to blossom and love to grow” (Jensen, 2002, p. 89). Thompson (1996, p. 63) is right in that personal presence does not nullify the need for words. Words generate and sustain personal relationships “by expressing character, thoughts, emotions and intentions. They warn and beckon and explain. They enable the making of promises and covenants. To say that God speaks is a shorthand way of saying that God is committed to personal relationships.” Vanhoozer (1998, p. 206) explains:

“Speakers have a responsibility for their linguistic actions, for example, to be true to their word, as in a promise. Language is not a code that bespeaks the subject, but a covenant that bestows dignity and responsibility on the agent of language. Far from relieving speakers from responsibility, then, the institution of language actually grounds and enables it.”

To sum up, there is indeed a design plan for language, and that design is for language to serve as communicative tool for communion between God and humans, and among humans ourselves.

2. God-Human Communication and Community

What constitutes the *imago Dei* in which God created man, male and female, has been the subject of longstanding and complicated debates. This paper does not purport to address that question, except to say this basic conviction: The image of God in man is man, himself or himself, the whole person, with all the faculties, including the ability to engage in intelligible speech via human language. Gaffin (VanDrunen, 2004, p. 183) puts it very well:

As our being itself is derived from God (we exist because he exists), and as our knowledge is an analogue of his knowledge (we know because he knows), so, too, our capacity for language and other forms of communication is derivative of his. We speak because God speaks, because he is a speaking God; that is his nature and so, derivatively, it is ours. In other words, man in his linguistic functions, as in all he is and does, is to be understood as the creature who is the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26).”

That language is constituted in the *imago Dei* is proven by the fact that only humans speak, while “animals remain silent” (Harrub et al., 2003, p. 93). The noted linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky, himself an evolutionist, observes: “When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the ‘human essence,’ the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man” (quoted in Fromkin et al., 2011, p. 3).

God is presented in Scriptures as seeking out, addressing, and communicating with humans. Right after he created Adam, he communicated with him, commanding him: “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 1:16–17). After he created Adam and Eve, God told them the creation mandate: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground . . .” (1:28–30). The Fall did not eradicate humans’ capacity for linguistic communication, nor did it deter God from further communicating with mankind. After the Fall, Gen. 3:9 records for us that the LORD called to the man saying,

“Where are you?” The rest of Gen. 3 tells us the ensuing conversation between God, Adam, Eve, and the serpent. The Fall in fact calls forth radical ways of God’s speaking (acting) if humans were to hear God’s voice, for they because of sin have become unable to see and hear. The Lord himself commanded Isaiah to prophesy: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving” (Isa. 6:9).

So indeed God spoke to the Jews “through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:3). For God would have wanted the Jews to be his mouthpiece, in fact his priests and prophets to the nations. But this did not work, for the Jews did not heed the prophets’ message. Would God suffer the nations to remain in darkness without hearing his voice? No, so this time around he spoke by his Son, who is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his being (Heb. 1:2–3). John calls the Son the eternal Word (John 1:1) who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (v. 14a).

Jesus Christ, the ultimate God–voice, envisages eternal life in terms of communion: “That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:5). “Knowing” here is to be understood in Hebraic sense, not Greek. We see a meaningful parallel here. God spoke to mankind through humans words. Ultimately, God spoke to mankind by having the eternal Word take on the human nature. Paul declared: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). God has spoken radically and effectively, and His church hears. His elect hear. His remnant hears.

The church is where real communion takes place between God and humans. The church is where language performs to its ideals—where God speaks and believers listen, where believers respond to God’s word through confession, praise, and prayers. Ward (2009, p. 177) explains the mechanics of this communion:

“Scripture, by which we mean the speech acts performed by means of the words of Scripture, is the primary means by which God presents himself to us, in such a way that we can know him and remain in a faithful relationship with him . . . Scripture is God in communicative action. Therefore to encounter the words of Scripture is to encounter God in action. Theologically Scripture is the means by which the Father presents his covenant to us, and therefore the means by which he presents himself to us as the faithful God of the covenant. It is also in the words of Scripture that the Word of God, Jesus Christ, comes to us so that we may know him and remain in him. And it is through the Scripture, which he authored, preserved and now illumines, that the Holy Spirit speaks to us most reliably. All this is what we are saying when we confess, simply, that “The Bible is the Word of God.”

The church is also where the God–intended communicative telos of language happens in the

sphere of human community, the subject of the ensuing section.

3. Human Communication and Community

What is the nature of human communication and how does it relate to human community? What crucial role does language play in human communication and in the building up of human relationships and communities?

Human communication is a very broad topic; it subsumes verbal and non-verbal communication systems, whereas this paper concerns itself with only the linguistic system of communication. Dictionary entries for “communication” include (1) the act of transmitting, (2) the message (content) transmitted, (3) the process by which a message is transmitted from sender to receiver through common and shared symbols, signs, or behaviors, and (4) the system for transmitting information. Academic books have more or less narrowed the meaning of communication to the transference of message from one person (speaker/sender) to another (listener/receiver). I contend that this conception is overly simplistic and, therefore, should be abandoned in favor of a conception that upholds the biblical teaching on human community and on the divinely-appointed telos for language.

There can be no denying: The sublime, sacred, and meaningful nature of both human community and linguistic communication is lost when approached from an evolutionary worldview. We would have wanted to find more in such a book as Michael Tomasello’s *Origins of Human Communication* published in 2010. But Tomasello does not have anything to offer except the claim that human communication evolved from what used to be primitive gestures (viz., of apes, his empirical subjects) to now sophisticated languages. Tomasello’s concept of humans’ fundamentally shared (or cooperative) intentionality (which he makes the ground for the evolution of human communication) eventually loses its meaning because of his evolutionary premise.

The *Atlas of Languages* declares: “No languageless community has ever been found” (cited in Harrub et al., 2003, p. 93). Fromkin et al. (2011, p. 34) write: “Wherever humans exist, language exists.” Why is this so? Stated above, this linguistic ability is ineradicable part of humanity, of the *imago Dei*. Two things should be noted. First, language is meant for the nurture of human relationships and community. Second, language learning and acquisition best happens in the context of human relationships and community.

Steven Pinker, director of Center of Cognitive Neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote in his *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind*:

As you are reading these words, you are taking part in one of the wonders of the natural world. For you and I belong to a species with a remarkable ability: we can shape events in each other's brains with remarkable precision. I am not referring to telepathy or mind control or the other obsessions of fringe science; even in the depictions of believers, these are blunt instruments compared to an ability that is uncontroversially present in every one of us. That ability is language. Simply making noises with our mouths, we can reliably cause precise new combinations of ideas to arise in each other's minds. The ability comes so naturally that we are apt to forget what a miracle it is . . . [H]uman language is based on a very different design . . . Even the seat of human language in the brain is special . . ." (cited in Harrub et al., 2003, p. 99, italics theirs).

That language is designed to foster community and best acquired in the context of that same community is the reason why a deprivation of that community results in the failure of language acquisition. "Any normal child, born anywhere in the world, of any racial, geographical, social, or economic heritage, is capable of learning any language to which he or she is exposed," write Fromkin et al. (2011, p. 35). Generally, at age four humans will have developed an ability to communicate through oral language. At age six or seven, most humans will have developed the ability to comprehend and express written thoughts (Harrub, 2003, p. 93). According to the critical-age hypothesis, language acquisition happens easily, swiftly, and without external intervention from the time of birth to middle childhood. As long as circumstances are normal, given linguistic exposure and stimulation through community, children will acquire language normally. But take away social stimulation, and any child will not acquire these abilities. Fromkin et al. (2011, p. 63) cite Genie's case in scientific reports in 1970. "She had been confined to a small room under conditions of physical restraint and had received only minimal human contact from the age of eighteen months until nearly fourteen years." She did not know any language by the time she was reintroduced into society. Though subsequently exposed to language for many years, Genie failed to acquire grammar, despite having learned many words. The UCLA linguist Susan Curtiss, who worked with Genie for several years, reported that many of Genie's utterances when she was 15 and older were like those of two-year old children, "the stringing together of content words, often with rich and clear meaning, but with little grammatical structure," quote Fromkin et al.

Only linguistic communication (in the case of the mute, sign-linguistic) allows humans to fully engage with each other. According to Adler and Rodman (cited in Hewett, 2012, p. 7) this kind of communication satisfies mankind's physical, identity, social, and practical needs. As to physical needs, "communication is so important that it is necessary for physical health. In fact, evidence suggests that an absence of satisfying communication can even jeopardize life itself . . . personal communication is essential for our well-being." As to identity needs, "communication does more than enable us to survive. It is the way, indeed the only way—we learn who we are

. . . our sense of identity comes from the way we interact with other people.” As to social needs, “these include ‘pleasure,’ ‘affection,’ ‘inclusion,’ ‘escape,’ ‘relaxation,’ and ‘control.’ Furthermore, imagine how empty your life would be if these needs were not satisfied?” As to practical needs, “everyday important functions . . . the tool that lets us tell the hair stylist to take just a little off the sides, direct the doctor to turn where it hurts . . . , etc.”

Human communication is unique in that it happens between or among persons who are capable of intentional mental states. “Intentional” is here used to refer to two things: (1) that humans are capable of thinking, believing, and feeling about something and (2) that humans are capable of intending this rather than that. The second aspect of intentionality can only be done by the use of language. Without language, we are left to speculate about the intentions and meanings of a person. Without the written Word of God, we would not have known God’s meanings and intentions. Torrance (1996, p. 31) wrote: “Unless we have a Word from God, some articulated communication from Himself to us, we are thrown back upon ourselves to authenticate His existence and to make Him talk by putting our words into His mouth and by clothing Him with our own ideas In other words, we have no genuine knowledge at all, for we are left alone with our own thoughts and self-deceptions.” He writes further: “In a true theology God’s Word is the condition and source of real knowledge God uttering His Word and uttering Himself in His Word, the speaking and acting and redeeming God” (32). This applies to human relationships as well, though as an exception sometimes a husband rightly guesses his wife’s meanings and intentions though bodily, non-verbal clues. We welcome J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory, systematized by J. Searle. This theory (or philosophy) helped us to realize that not only do we say things with our words; more importantly, we do things with our words. In a world of communicative agents, meaning is not primarily what words mean out of context but in context (“meaning as something people do,” Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 202). Meaning, therefore, “has less to do with the play of linguistic elements in an impersonal sign system than with the responsibility of communicative agents in inter-subjective social situations” (Vanhoozer, 1998, p. 203).

Language is a communal need. Adam was not a human community; Eve and he were a community. If man were to exist alone, would language still be a necessity? First, our view of language is not utilitarian but organic and systemic in the *imago Dei*. Noam Chomsky’s design view of language, except for its evolutionary point of departure, is close to the biblical viewpoint in that he argued that humans are specifically and complexly designed to learn language. The problem with his view is that his language-designer is not God but the impersonal progress of evolution. Humans, therefore, are by virtue of God’s design linguistic beings. Second, the above question is rendered pointless by God’s plan—his very plan was not simply to create an individual but a race.

4. Responsible use of language

How to use language is not up to us; it is up to the Creator who fashioned us in his image and endowed us with this great gift. That *imago Dei*, however, now lies ruined because of our first parents' Fall to sin. As human language and communication are part and parcel of that image, they too now lie ruined, in need of repair; in fact, in need of no less than God's restoring intervention. This sad state of affairs is quite easy for us to see. Just think of how "the human race is greatly given to lying," said the journalist Katherine Whitehorn (cited in Aitchison, p. 20). Aitchison (p. 21) defines lying as "the ability to talk convincingly about something entirely fictitious, with no back-up of circumstantial evidence." Language has been the most useful tool by those in politics and mass media advertising to manipulate people and advance their purely materialistic interests. The American film producer Joseph Levine commented: "You can fool all the people all of the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough" (cited in Aitchison, p. 23). In the political arena, language "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind," according to George Orwell (cited in Aitchison, p. 23). As a case in point, Aitchison (p. 23) quotes US ex-president Richard Nixon as having said this, based on official 1969 White House meeting minutes: "You can say that this Administration will have the first complete, far-reaching attack on the problem of hunger in history. Use all the rhetoric, as long as it does not cost money." Unprecedented breakthroughs in communication technologies are coupled not with unprecedented human communication success but unprecedented communication breakdowns. Plus, the postmodern ethos engenders pessimism and cynicism that support the view of language as a self-serving tool to advance selfish personal or group interests.

These observations align with the Bible's graphic representation of sinful human speech. According to James 3 the tongue is untamable, "a world of evil among the parts of the body," corrupting the whole person, setting the whole course of his life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell (v. 6), a restless evil, and full of deadly poison (v. 8). Paul in Romans 1 clinches mankind's total depravity, saying in v. 21, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him." Paul goes on in the immediately ensuing verses. What happened to human tongue is this: what ought to be our glory has now become our shame (Gaffin, 2004, p. 187).

Thankfully, the Bible did stop with only the bleak picture of human speech. It tells us that the eternal Word took on human flesh, yes like us, except that he had no sin. He is the final, ultimate, and eschatological God-speech, after him there is no other, for He is the "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3), and "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). There was no deceit in his mouth; rather he spoke "gracious words" (Luke 4:22) and "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). God has purposed that his saints be

“conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). Christ by his life showed us the untainted *imago Dei* and by his death and resurrection made it possible to kick-start the restoration process of that shattered image in fallen mankind. Based on this indicative, Paul lays out the imperative for the redeemed community, in terms of human speech: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak the truth to his neighbor” (Eph. 4:25). He says in v. 29, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”; and v. 31, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Gaffin (2004, p. 190) notes that these behaviors are not coerced or feigned among Christians, owing to the sovereign work of the Spirit.

What can perhaps be the greatest incentive for responsible human speech is Jesus’ warning in Matthew 12:36–37, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” The warning is made serious by Jesus’ typical “I tell you” formula (in verse 36) and the theme of ultimate judgment. The Greek *argos* translated “careless” in the NIV and many other versions is better translated “idle” (as in KJV) or empty. A word is idle not so much because it is spoken by an idle person (that point is secondary, contra Nolland, 2005, p. 507) as because it is not backed up by actions (France, 2007, p. 407) and does not correspond to reality, as in a lie. In context, the Pharisees’ charge against Jesus (12:24) was an empty, vain, and deceptive utterance for it did not match the truth. In verse 37, Jesus zeroes in on the importance of words: we will be judged for the words that we said. Nolland (2005, p. 508) says it well: “Words spoken provide a proper basis for the judgment to be made precisely because they are a faithful index of the nature of the real person.” The words we spoke “will not be treated as nothing,” contends the Jamieson–Fausset–Brown Bible Commentary. “Words as the index of the heart, however idle they may seem, will be taken account of, whether good or bad, in estimating character in the day of judgment.”

Conclusion

Seen from the biblical perspective, language is beautiful, meaningful, hopeful, personal, social, communal, and covenantal. We need to thank God for this gift, celebrate it, and use it for according to his purposes.

Language has the unique power to deepen our interpersonal relationships. We cannot engage fully with other people until we speak to them and they speak to us. Body language and pleasant facial expressions cannot do it all. I experienced this firsthand when I met my Korean foster father after I was away on a three-week foreign trip. He knows no English at all. On

the other hand, I know only a dozen of Korean phrases. But I badly wanted to ask how he was doing, and he also was so eager to know about my trip. So I mustered all my courage to talk to him, putting to use my dozen Korean phrases. Fortunately, he largely understood the key points that I wanted to convey, though he had to read between the lines of my talk. But surely, that was very gratifying for both of us. And so I have realized that the most basic value of language learning, whatever language it is, is to be able to communicate.

Yes teachers should stress verbal accuracy in their language instruction. Yes, language learners should strive perfection in their use of whatever language. But the moral imperative lies not in linguistic perfection but in the divine purpose, with which language is endowed—for interpersonal communication, indeed, for communion! It is precisely this desire for communication that motivates us to use language correctly and responsibly.

References

- Aitchison, J. (1996). *The seeds of speech: Language origin and evolution*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2006). *Language and Mind*. Enlarged Ed. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Christensen, D. L. (1991). *Deuteronomy 1–11 (Vol. 6A)*. Word biblical commentary. Dallas, TX: Waco Books.
- Frame, J. M. (2010). *The doctrine of the Word of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: R & R Publishing.
- France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. The new international commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2011). *An introduction to language (9th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Gaffin, R. B. (2004). *Speech and the image of God: Biblical reflections on language and its uses*. In D. VanDrunen (Ed.), *The pattern of sound doctrine: Systematic theology at the Westminster seminaries* (pp. 181–193). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Gordon, C. H. (1993). *Language and theology*. Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation.
- Harrub, B., Thompson, B., & Miller, D. (2003). *The origin of language and communication*. *Technical Journal* 17(3), pp. 93–101. Retrieved from http://creation.com/images/pdfs/tj/j17_3/j17_3_93-101.pdf
- Hewett, D. (2012). *The nature of human communication*. In D. Hewett, F. Graham, M. Barber, & T. Harrison (Eds.), *The intensive interaction handbook* (pp. 3–8). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Jensen, P. (2002). *The revelation of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Kopf, D. W., Park M. S., & Cambra, R. E. *Elements of Communication*. Seoul, Korea: Han Shin Publishing.
- Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew*. The new international Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Souba, W. (2011). *The language of discovery*. *Journal of Biomedical Discovery and Collaboration*, 6, 53–69. doi: 10.5210/disco.v6i0.3634
- Thompson, M. D. (2006). *A clear and present word: The clarity of Scripture*. Nottingham, England: Apollos.
- Torrance, T. F. (1996). *Theological science*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Vanhoozer, K. J. (1998). *Is there a meaning in this text?: The Bible, the reader, and the morality of literary knowledge*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Ward, Timothy. (2009). *Words of Life: Scripture as the living and active Word of God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.
- Ward, Timothy (2002). *Word and supplement: Speech acts, Biblical texts, and the sufficiency of Scripture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Webber, R. E. (1980). *God still speaks: A biblical view of Christian communication*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Wolterstorff, N. (1995). *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks*. Cambridge,

England: Cambridge University Press.
Wright, C. (1996). Deuteronomy (Vol. 4). New international biblical commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary. <http://bible.cc/matthew/12-36.htm>