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Language as a Common, Public, and Collective Good

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Abstract

This paper explores the similarities and differences between language as the realization of a universal, inherently human ability and as a collective good shared by all people. As a universal human good, language is concretely manifested in various forms, functioning as a collective good for both smaller and larger social groups. This can be seen, for example, in a national language, which is realized with varying degrees of difference, such as family speech, local dialects, sociolects, or substandard idioms. Language as a public good refers to a linguistic system used as a common means of communication for a broader community, typically at the state level (the standard language). The paper discusses the characteristics, similarities, and differences between the roles and acquisition of language as a collective good (first language competence) and language as a public good (second language competence). Given the different communicative (private/public communication, spoken/written communication) and identity-related roles (belonging to a narrower/broader social group), as well as the distinct methods of acquisition (spontaneous/non-spontaneous, unconscious/conscious), it is important within a larger social community to foster a positive attitude toward the standard language as a public good and promote its acquisition within formal education systems. In doing so, it is necessary to anticipate and address the challenges that may arise in mastering the public (standard) language, such as neutral or negative attitudes toward the standard language, fear of using the standard language, and other related difficulties.

Keywords: individual language, community language, linguistic features, linguistic symbolization, linguistic identity

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