**Lecture Three: Language Forms: Speech and Writing**

Language has two media through which messages can be sent: ***speech*** and ***writing***. Moreover, it is possible to transfer the message from one medium to another. Linguists studied both speech and writing and found that speech is prior to writing: biologically, historically, functionally and structurally.

**1. Biologically:** Children learn to listen and speak before they learn how to read and write. They start to speak in a natural way i.e. without being trained on how to speak. However, In the case of writing, things are totally different. Children are taught how to read and write and receive special instruction in order to master these skills.

**2. Historically:** Speech goes back to the very beginnings of human existence. Human societies possessed the spoken language before the invention of writing. In comparison to speech, writing is rather recent in that it was invented by the Sumerians around 3200 BC. Later, various writing systems developed. Therefore, speech is prior to writing.

**3. Functionally:** Generally speaking, both speech and writing are used to convey messages. Nonetheless, we use speech in most of our daily activities and interactions with others. In other words, speech is more dominant than writing. Speech can be used in almost all situations of life (daily communication, mass media, school, telephone, etc.). The use of writing is rather restricted to special cases like written texts: literary, historical, etc. Equally, writing can substitute speech in some situations in which vocal-auditory communication is impossible.

**4.** **The Structural Priority** can be better illustrated through the findings of Biber (1988). According to him writing is found to be:

1. more structurally complex and elaborate than speech, indicated by features such as longer sentences or T-units and a greater use of subordination (O’Donnell et al., 1967; Chafe, 1982; Tannen, 1982a, 1985; Gumperz et al., 1984);

2. more explicit than speech, in that it has complete idea units with all assumptions and logical relations encoded in the text (Olson, 1977; Chafe, 1986);

3. more decontextualized, or autonomous, than speech, so that it is less dependent on shared situation or background knowledge (Gumperz et al., 1984; Olson, 1977);

4. less personally involved than speech and more detached and abstract than speech (Blankenship, 1974; Chafe, 1982; Chafe & Danielewicz, 1986);

5. characterized by a higher concentration of new information than speech (Stubbs, 1980; Brown and Yule, 1983); and

6. more deliberately organized and planned than speech (Ochs, 1979; Rubin, 1980; Akinnaso, 1982; Brown & Yule, 1983; Gumperz et al., 1984). (as cited in Liu, 1996, p.23)

**References:**

Liu, C. K. (1996). *Research on English Composition*. Taipei: The Crane Publishing Co.