**Lecture Seven: Functions of Language**

**Introduction**

In linguistics, the functionalist school approaches language in terms of the functions it performs, associated with the Prague School, the approach has been concerned with the way elements in a particular language accomplish these functions.

R. Jakobson, a structural linguist, defined six functions of language when it is put for the purpose of communication (**Communication Functions**):

* The referential function (informational function): it is a kind of language used to give or ask for information, it is neutral and objective; no feelings and emotions are involved.

e.g. "The autumn leaves have all fallen now."

The distance between the university and the city centre is 03KM

* *The emotive function*: it is a kind of language through which speakers express themselves, whether a person is experiencing feelings of happiness, sadness, grief or otherwise. It is best exemplified by interjections e.g. "Wow, what a view!", and other expressions such as I think, I believe, as fa as I am concerned…
* *The conative function*: it is a kind of language used to convince the listener. It engages the Addressee (receiver) directly and is best illustrated by imperatives, e.g. "Tom! Come inside and eat!"
* *The metalingual (alternatively called "metalinguistic" or "reflexive") function:* is the use of language to check whether what has been said is comprehensible. Such expressions like: is it OK? Are you following? Can I go on? Are expressions of the metalingual function.
* *The phatic function*: is language for the sake of interaction. It can be observed in greetings and casual discussions of the weather, particularly with strangers. It also provides the keys to open, maintain, verify or close the communication channel: "Hello?", "Ok?", "Hummm", "Bye"...in the phatic function, it is not what one says that matters but the fact of saying it. Some linguists call it ‘sweet-nothing’; it is nothing in meaning but it is sweet in terms of human relations, some others call it ‘small talk’ and other ‘empty talk’. Remarks about the weather, in the British culture, are a good example
* *The poetic function*: it is a kind of language used to show the aesthetic (beautiful) side of the language, it focuses on the message for its own sake. Prose and poetry are good examples.

Besides, Jackobson suggested that each speech event (piece of communication) should have:

1. The addresser: the speaker
2. The addressee: the listener
3. The message: it is sent from the addresser to the addressee
4. The context: the message must be sent in an appropriate context
5. The contact: there should be a relation between the addresser and the addressee
6. The code: it could be oral, written.

Jackobson related the six factors to the six functions. If communication is much going with contact, the function of language that is dominated is the *phatic function.* If communication if directed to the listener, the function of language that is dominated is*the conative function.*  If communication is to check whether the addressee and the addresser are following the same code, the function of language that is dominated is*the metalingual function.* If communication concerns more the addresser, the function of language that is dominated is*the emotive function.* however, sometimes we can not determine which function dominates a speech event e.g.

I feel like a cup of tea: it can be the emotive function

It can be the phatic function

It can be the poetic function

In addition, Halliday distinguished three distinctive functions of language (or metafunctions). The ***ideational (or experiential***), The ***textual function,*** The ***interpersonal function.***

* The ***ideational (or experiential***) function is the conveying of semantic content representing information about our experience of the external world (including our own minds).
* The ***textual function*** is the linking of linguistic elements to other linguistic elements, so that the various parts of a text can be integrated into a coherent and cohesive whole and related to the wider context of our speech or writing.
* The ***interpersonal function*** is the establishment and maintenance of social relations, including persuading other people to do things or to believe things.