

A Character Language for the World's Citizens? A Philosophical Review

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Abstract

This is a philosophical review on the paper Towards a Character Language: A Probability in Language Use, the ontological, epistemological and axiological aspects of which are identified, accounted for, and made significant on the questioned entitled proposition. The ontology highlights the what aspects, the epistemology does the how aspects and the axiology does the why aspects of the thesis. This review thus comprises accounts on the three philosophical aspects, strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and its probable contribution to the global harmony, in the real world as well as in the virtual world. Objective, less-opinionated accounts with some highlights are given on the philosophical aspects, while subjective perspectives are elaborated on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. Based on the axiological aspects, probable contributions are predicted for the global harmony, as languages of the world are presumably universal, especially in the verbal interaction of meanings shared and practiced together by the members within particular speech societies or particular ethnic groups throughout the world.

Keywords: Jumanto; Towards a character language; A probability in language use; Philosophy of language; Ontology; Epistemology; Axiology; Character language; The world harmony; Review

Abbreviation: CL: Character Language

Introduction

Giving a review on an own paper is not very easy. However, when there is a request to you to do so, it is a big honor too difficult to reject or even too precious to object to. This is then not the only reason I am writing this, but what I am doing now is to express my great gratitude as well as happiness on what I (the author) have told the world which probably has found its path. The author has already put forward something on his very first opening 'I am not very sure whether this idea works or not, despite my preference or earnest hope on the former to the latter' (p. 333). Furthermore, he has long believed that the proposal of a character language is 'probably lacking advocacy, but hopefully getting a little attention' (p. 334).

As have been shown in the abstract, this review paper is focusing on 5 (five) aspects of the thesis in the article, i.e. the ontological aspects, the epistemological aspects, the axiological aspects, the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, and the probable contributions to the world harmony. These philosophical perspectives are applied here, as philosophical methods include questioning, critical discussion, rational argument, and systematic presentation [1]. The ontological aspects are about what in the thesis, meanwhile the epistemological aspects talk about how the thesis works. The axiological aspects are about why or significances of the thesis for human verbal interactions, the ideas of which are later developed into probable contributions of the thesis to the world harmony. The probable contributions are given an account after the talk about strengths and weaknesses of the thesis.

The thesis character language (CL) is, not unexpectedly, not very easy to define. After observing some definitions proposed by experts, the author finally decided to come to dictionaries instead of articles or papers, and came to an inference that 'a character language is able to function as a means of communication (ability), has qualities with which the language is different from the others (quality), and is effective in a correct formality (validity)' (p. 335). This inference or definition, you may call so, is unique, as experts 'talk more about students with character rather than a language with character' (p. 334). The word character was then referred to as highlighting 3 important aspects of it, i.e. the ability,

the quality, and the validity of a particular language (p.335). This thesis of CL was then brought up to exist for open elaboration upon a fair account of formal and functional linguistics (p. 334).

This linguistic program for all members of speech society to a level of linguistic and communicative dexterity is not easy to carry out, as speakers usually have freedom of language as part of their personal freedom. However, as speakers of language are social members who commonly prefer harmonious life, adjustment of their language to particular situation and to particular hearer needs to be done for the sake of all. Personal freedom in this case is adjusted to appreciation of others. An enforced linguistic unity for the sake of common social harmony is worth applying, even if it is questionably against personal freedom.

Language use as a matter of probabilities is the core issue in this CL thesis. Based on this issue, the author then introduced the newly-termed 'distant language and close language' (p. 336). From this set of notions, the author then as suggested in the word probabilities coined the derived terms, i.e., politeness, camaraderie, impoliteness, rude situations, and awkward situations. These terms of politeness, camaraderie, impoliteness, rude situations, awkward situations are expectedly winning the speakers' heart and interest and then are realized, internalized and practiced by those of a particular language in a speech community, thus encouraging the world harmony.

The Proposed Thesis: A Character Language

Ontological aspects

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, becoming, existence and/or reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their

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Received May 24, 2017; Accepted July 22, 2017; Published July 29, 2017

Citation: Jumanto J (2017) A Character Language for the World's Citizens? A Philosophical Review. J Psychol Psychother 7: 319. doi: [10.4172/2161-0487.1000319](https://doi.org/10.4172/2161-0487.1000319)

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relations [2]. A character language is one 'able to function as a means of communication (ability), has qualities with which the language is different from the others (quality) and is effective in a correct formality (validity)' (p. 335). Character language with ability, quality and validity is the first ontological aspect of the thesis of CL. Ability refers to the function of a particular language to convey interpersonal as well as personal meanings, the quality does to the nature of that language to differ from other languages and the validity does to whether situations are formal or informal, whether you need to be polite or you need to be familiar or close to others (cf. p. 335). The other ontological aspects of CL are interaction of meanings, form, distant language or politeness, close language or camaraderie, object language and metalanguage (pp. 335-338).

The aspect of meaning interaction is indeed very pragmatic. Based on this very notion, communication or verbal interactions between or among people is basically a transfer of meaning from a speaker to a hearer. The form of that meaning is just a vehicle to transport the meaning. Without the vehicle, there will be no communication, except a mind-to-mind or paranormal transfer of energy on particular message. The former is of pragmatics, and the latter is beyond our verbal language analysis.

The author was smart to provide an illustration on pragmatics as interaction of meanings. 'Pragmatic linguistics or linguistic pragmatics or, for short, pragmatics is not merely talking about locution, illocution or perlocution. It inevitably is' (p. 335). A speech is an act with the three meanings, i.e., locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary meanings. In pragmatics, this each meaning can be a force, an illocutionary or a pragmatic force (p. 335). We are speaking and doing something at the same time or to be more pragmatically specific: we do the act of saying something, implying something, and affecting someone at the same time (p. 335). The author interestingly illustrated that 'In the context that a speaker is talking to a cold wall or even a beautiful statue, or is speaking alone (soliloquy), we miss the perlocution' (p. 335). Surprisingly, the author added something missed by other pragmatic researchers that 'Austin's elaboration of speech acts theory is, in the writer's opinion, in line with Malinowski's argument that language is a mode of action' (p. 335).

The next aspect of ontology of CL is the form, the perceived verbal language itself. The author observed that form in CL was of three dichotomy types, i.e., (1) formal-informal, (2) direct-indirect, and (3) literal-non literal (p. 336). The word 'formality' refers to high or strict attention to rules, forms and convention, and, therefore, informality does the reverse (p. 336). Formal utterances have more complete, longer forms and are in a good order. Informal utterances have incomplete, shorter forms, and are not in a good order, and sometimes cut-down, reversed-up and changed in favor of the speaker (p. 341). Meanwhile, form of direct utterances is that whose meanings can be soon interpreted directly from parts of the utterances, i.e., the meanings based on linguistic context (cohesive meanings) and usually called explicature in pragmatics. The opposite of this is called implicature. Implicatures are the meanings of indirect utterances, i.e. the meanings based on context of situation (coherent meanings). To come to an implicature of an indirect utterance, a hearer usually thinks a bit longer than he does to an explicature of a direct utterance (p. 336). The third type is form of literal and non-literal utterances. Literal utterances are the utterances in their usual and obvious sense, while the opposite is non-literal or figurative utterances. Non-literal utterances involve allegories and metaphors. Allegories are stories, paintings, or descriptions of ideas such as anger, patience, purity, and truth by symbols of persons with those characters.

Metaphors are imaginative ways to describe something by referring to something else with the similar characteristics or qualities. A metaphoric language is thus the language with no usual or literal meaning but the language which describes something by images or symbols. Direct and literal utterances include banter, while indirect and non-literal utterances involve irony and hedges (p. 336).

Distant language or politeness and close language or camaraderie are other aspects of the ontology of CL. The author stated that distant language and close language here refer to and derive from the notion social distance (p. 336) and provided a definition of social distance that it is the physical as well as psychological distance between the speaker and the hearer (p. 336). The author also gave a brief account of social distance that it is not distant nor close. It is a flexible concept of relative relationship between the speakers. Social distance is assumed to be zero when the speaker is talking to themselves¹ (p. 337).

In this sense of distant language and close language, the author has stipulated that politeness embraces both, by his working definition that 'politeness is everything good that has been uttered as well as acted by the speaker to the hearer within a particular context, to maintain their interpersonal face as well as their social face' (p. 337). That close language is actually just a variant of distant language, and that camaraderie is just a variant of politeness, and that closeness politeness is just a variant of distancing politeness are affirmed (cf. p. 337). And under the light of face management theory, the author has argued that distant language or politeness or distancing politeness is in line with Goffman's negative face [3], Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategies [4], Renkema's respect politeness [5] and Jumanto's politeness [6]. Close language or camaraderie or closeness politeness, as the other variant, therefore, refers to Goffman's positive face [3], Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies [4], Renkema's solidarity politeness [5] and Jumanto's friendship or camaraderie [6] (p. 337). This tendency has been well-strengthened and highlighted by the results of Jumanto's research on phatic communication among English native speakers (p. 337).

The notion set of object language and metalanguage is then the last ontological aspect of this CL proposition by the author, as 'the two levels of language has long been advocated by de Saussurians and Peircians since early 1900' (p. 338). The author has greatly emphasized this set importance, as 'the grand theorists of the states of the linguistic arts and their influences have persisted in linguistic areas to date' (p. 338). The author proposed an illustration on this that 'the first level of language function is called object language, noted as denotative level, which is the usual and obvious sense of language, based on some convention, which is objective (p. 338). Language is seen as an object (object language), for instance, the word RAT in this level refers to an animal, i.e., a four-footed mammal of the rodent family (p. 338). Furthermore, 'the second level of language is called meta-language, noted as connotative level, which is the level of additional meaning to give an image or imagination based on some convention, which is subjective (p. 338). This level is metaphorical, which is an imaginative way to describe something by referring to something else with the similar characteristics or qualities (p. 338). For instance, the word RAT may be used to describe a person who breaks or deserts the duty (p. 338). The author also provided another illustration, i.e., the word HEART. The word HEART as object language is the center of blood circulation in the human body, but as a meta-language it may refer to somebody the speaker is in love with (p. 338).

Thus, CL has been formulated ontologically based on its aspects illustrated above, i.e., character, interaction of meanings, form, distant

¹An inspiring opinion given by Professor Asim Gunarwan, during his pragmatic classes, at University of Indonesia, in 2002-2006.

language or politeness, close language or camaraderie, object language, and metalanguage. This set of ontological aspects has, therefore, and I believed in, fulfilled one-third of a philosophy of language, the philosophy of which is a set of efforts done to bring up a new phenomenon to set up a linguistic theory.

Epistemological aspects

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge [7]. The aspects of epistemology of character language (CL) I would like to highlight in this review are politeness and impoliteness in language use. As how aspects are talked about here, this part of review concerns with how politeness happens, and how the other variant, i.e. impoliteness, may also happen between speakers and hearers in particular verbal interactions. How politeness happens, how camaraderie happens, how rude situations will probably happen and how awkward situations will also probably happen are how aspects elaborated in this review.

I am very sure that what has happened to the author's mind upon launching his ideas is a matter of sincerity that his proposition would be beneficial to the world of verbal interactions. The author has truly believed that 'Indonesia is a diglossic speech situation' (p. 338) and he would also believe that the diglossic situation probably exists out there in any living speech community throughout the world and among the world languages. Let us observe together our discussions below.

The how aspect in the so-called politeness as proposed in the author's CL is basically how to use distant language or politeness or distancing politeness to superiors. As the form of utterances for politeness is formal, indirect, and non-literal, it is highly important to have in mind of a speaker utterances of that type of form. The formal utterance I thank you very much, for instance, is recommendable for us to use to superiors when thanking or submitting our gratitude (p. 339). Others with similar meanings, i.e., Thank you; Thanks; Thx are not recommendable, as the latter are informal and probably considered rude to superiors, especially those in the first meet or encounter. Other examples of formal utterances recommendable in this context are giving; give them, Good morning! May you get better soon, helping; help them, extremely tired, etc., instead of the informal ones, i.e., givin'; giv'em, Morning! Get better soon; Better soon, helpin'; help'em, exhausted, etc. (p. 339).

The indirect utterance I think that it is better like this...for instance, is recommendable for us to use to superiors when disagreeing or showing disagreement (p. 340). Another with similar meaning, i.e., I do not agree with you is not recommendable, as the latter is direct and probably considered rude to superiors. Other examples of indirect utterances recommendable in this context are:

Do you have something else to drink?

It is hot here, isn't it?

They are in puppy love

Where is the gardener?

What if we do this tomorrow?

et cetera, instead of the direct ones, i.e.,

I do not drink coffee

Please turn on the AC!

Their love is not very serious

Call the gardener!

I am busy. You should not disturb me now

et cetera (p. 340).

The non-literal utterance Rats in the government corrupt a country, for instance, is recommendable for us to use to superiors when expressing an idea or showing an opinion (p. 341). Another with similar meaning, i.e., corruptors corrupt a country is not recommendable, as the latter is literal and probably considered rude to superiors. Other examples of non-literal utterances recommendable in this context are:

That runner is like a horse

Have a rubber time

A gasbag

Pass water

Restroom

et cetera, instead of the literal ones, i.e.,

That runner is never tired

Always come late

Talk too much

Urinate

Toilet/bathroom

et cetera (p. 341). Topics of distant language to superiors should also be kept in mind, i.e., common and safe topics only (p. 341). Instances of these are family, sports, weather and others, i.e., those not personal or private. Elaboration of these topics should be carefully made, i.e., not to produce questions or statements indicating something too personal or too private beyond the topics.

The how aspect in the so-called camaraderie as proposed in the author's CL is basically how to use close language or camaraderie or closeness politeness to close people. Close people are those, I believe, we have known for a relatively long time. A relatively long time here may not refer to the first meet or encounter, but a relative period of time together shared and experienced by two people or more, in which they then probably become or call each other friends. Common interests are usually shared together in a harmonious relationship. As the form of utterances for camaraderie is informal, direct, and literal, it is highly important to have in mind of a speaker utterances of that type of form. The informal utterances Thank you; Thanks; Thx, for instance, are recommendable for us to use to close people when thanking or submitting our gratitude (p. 339). Another with similar meaning, i.e., I thank you very much is not recommendable, as the latter is formal and probably considered awkward to close people, especially those in intimate relationship. Other examples of informal utterances recommendable in this context are givin'; giv'em, Morning!, Get better soon; Better soon, helpin'; help'em, exhausted, etc., instead of the formal ones, i.e., giving; give them, Good morning!, May you get better soon, helping; help them, extremely tired, etc. (p. 339).

The direct utterance I do not agree with you, for instance, is recommendable for us to use to close people when disagreeing or showing disagreement (p. 340). Another with similar meaning, i.e., I think that it is better like this ...is not recommendable, as the latter is indirect and probably considered awkward to close people. Other examples of direct utterances recommendable in this context are:

I do not drink coffee
Please turn on the AC!
Their love is not very serious
Call the gardener!
I am busy. You should not disturb me now
et cetera, instead of the indirect ones, i.e.,
Do you have something else to drink?
It is hot here, isn't it?
They are in puppy love
Where is the gardener?
What if we do this tomorrow?
et cetera (p. 340).

The literal utterance Corruptors corrupt a country, for instance, is recommendable for us to use to close people when expressing an idea or showing an opinion (p. 340). Another with similar meaning, i.e., Rats in the government corrupt a country is not recommendable, as the latter is non-literal and probably considered awkward to close people. Other examples of literal utterances recommendable in this context are:

That runner is never tired

Always come late

Talk too much

Urinate

Toilet/bathroom

et cetera, instead of the non-literal ones, i.e.,

That runner is like a horse

Have a rubber time

A gasbag

Pass water

Restroom

et cetera (p. 340). Topics of close language to close people are any of personal and private (p. 341), free or freely-elaborated, i.e., salary, religion, age, politics, pornography and others. Others here may refer to whatever comes across the mind of the speakers, including touchy and dangerous topics. Elaboration of these topics are usually freely and creatively made, i.e., even any questions or statements indicating the touchy and dangerous topics.

The how aspect in the so-called impoliteness is of two types of situations, i.e., rude situations and awkward situations. The author has stipulated that politeness and camaraderie happen when we use distant language and close language intelligibly, i.e., distant language to superiors and close language to close people respectively (p. 341). As the author has spoken of politeness and camaraderie in the Indonesian language, the Indonesian speakers adjust their utterances to a particular situation that may call. They can perform the so-called code-switching, whether to use the distant Indonesian language or to use the close Indonesian language.

Impoliteness in language use happens when speakers of a particular

language do not learn the distant language and close language. When they use close language to superiors, probably due to their lack of knowledge about distant language, they are being not polite or they are being rude, or impoliteness (rude situations) happens. On the other context, when they use distant language (e.g. ironical utterances) to close hearers, probably intentionally due to some interpersonal friction, they are also being not polite or impoliteness (awkward situations) happens. In this case, they are trying to be distant to close hearers. Awkwardness will probably be in the air and there will usually be less harmony between the speaker and the hearer (p. 342).

An interesting supposition was given by the author in the context of language use confusion. 'In case of confusion that happens due to the factors of power and solidarity in the hearer, i.e., whether a superior is close or a close hearer has power, the so-called code-mixing happens. However, as the terminology suggests, the code-mixing in language use belongs to informality, thus using a close language (camaraderie).² Cases like these usually happen between close speakers, i.e. a superior to a close subordinate or a subordinate to a close superior (p. 346). Moreover, the author has also stated that '...as the code-mixing happens only between close speakers, awkwardness does not usually happen and politeness between them is maintained. Camaraderie instills. Language use is a matter of probabilities (p. 346).

Axiological aspects

Axiology is the philosophical study of value. It is either the collective term for ethics and aesthetics [8]. Talking about axiological aspects means an account for significances of a research project. To start with, as have been said before, the author has provided a definition on politeness, i.e. 'Politeness is everything good that has been uttered as well as acted by the speaker to the hearer within a particular context, to maintain their interpersonal face as well as their social face' (p. 337). Politeness in language use is basically distant language and close language together in context (p. 341). Distant language and close language refer to and derive from the notion social distance, i.e., the physical as well as psychological distance between the speaker and the hearer (p. 336).

This research on pragmatics regards a diglossic situation in a particular speech society as having the two variants of language. Distant language refers to formal, indirect, and non-literal utterances, while close language refers to informal, direct and literal utterances. As referring to formal, indirect and non-literal utterances, distant language is usually carefully elaborated and uses safe and common topics (p. 341). Meanwhile, as referring to informal, direct, and literal utterances, close language usually involves contractions, slangs, reverse-ups, changes, taboos, swearing, f-words and uses any topics, personal and private (p. 341).

In the part of speakers of a particular language, they tend to use distant language to hearers with power factor (superiors); on the other hand, they tend to use close language to hearers with solidarity factor (close hearers) (p. 341). The author has set examples of superiors, i.e., our bosses, our supervisors, our parents, and others, those who can relatively be close or not close to us (p. 341), still we are supposed to pay some respect due to their superiority, for one thing or another. He also has set examples of subordinates, i.e., our employees, our younger siblings, our servants, and others, those who can relatively be close or not close to us [9]³ (p. 341). Getting subordinates to be close to us is

²Analogy of this is just like wearing a T-shirt and a tie. Using a language is, indeed, like wearing clothes [6, p. II-346].

³Adopted and adapted from Brown and Gilman [9]

probably easier than getting superiors to be close to us. In the case of the former, we can probably use close language more conveniently, as the power relatively belongs to us.

As the axiological aspect of character language (CL) proposition, distant language brings politeness to superiors and close language brings friendship or camaraderie (p. 341). Either politeness or camaraderie which is maintained between or among speakers of a particular language refers to harmonious situations. These situations are conducive to the development of cultures of a speech community, whereas rude situations or awkward situations are usually not.

On another context, CL elaboration to show politeness and camaraderie finally meet the demand of language as a human means of communication, i.e., a real-life everyday use of language in all situations or pragmatic use of language in a diglossic situation (p. 338). From the part of speakers, those who are able to switch their language eligibly to suit the situation that may call, i.e., character language, will become character citizens, as they sound educated and contribute to social harmony in societies they belong to or other places they pay visits to.

To some national scope, the author has also proposed a social verbal project, i.e., a CL project for national harmony, which comprises 6 (six) phases, with different ratio of probabilities (distant language:close language): (1) interaction phase (25:75), (2) teaching-and-learning process phase (50:50), (3) evaluation phase (50:50), (4) re-evaluation phase (50:50), (5) verification phase (50:50) and (6) selection phase (50:50) (pp. 346-347). This CL project is verbal, as it involves language, and it is social, as it involves many parties or agents to encourage the success of the project: parents, teachers, communities, societies and the authorities: the school managers, the local government and the national government (p. 346). The projection of the CL project proposed by the author is difficult but not impossible. The project should be set up nationally and should apply to all citizens from early linguistically-mature age, thus it is of native speakers trying to acquire their language. Upon the acquisition of CL in the CL building project, they become character citizens who are able to contribute to national harmony through their character language use.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Thesis

As have been said, the CL thesis proposed and discussed in this paper is a verbal social project. A social project here implies that the whole speech society is invited as well as involved in the project: parents, teachers, communities, societies and the authorities: the school managers, the local government, and the national government, the huge project of which is not easy to apply massively. The stakeholder theory which involves morals and values should be there in the project management. The approach attempts to address the principle of who or what really counts [10], as the nature of what constitutes a stakeholder is highly contested [11]. This verbal social project is costly, but is not impossible to carry out when there is a will and unity. The aspects of CL thesis may become the building blocks of the CL project, which are worth applying in the efforts to equip the state children of tomorrow with a CL for the future of a character nation (p. 347).

Furthermore, the pragmatics of CL contributes to character nation building in the scope of verbal performances of a competent character speaker. A competent character speaker is a good speaker who in time will probably be a good character leader in a particular country (p. 347).

As a character language equips the speakers with politeness and camaraderie and with awareness of avoiding impoliteness, both in rude situations and in awkward situations, the teaching and learning of it and

later the acquisition of it, will contribute to interpersonal, communal, social and, in time, national harmony (p. 347).

Those above are strengths of CL thesis proposition. However, this research project has shortcomings or weaknesses. The first is that this CL thesis has been based on an in-depth contemplation by the author as an Indonesian native speaker. Contemplation has classically worked or has proven to work as an important part of philosophy, as suggested and practiced by Plato [12]. And, the author believes in the light of this, that an in-depth contemplation through an ample period of time is a good access to knowledge and science. However, promising to be fruitful, the thesis has not been researched to the extent that it has encompassed and accommodated various views of peoples in Indonesia. This is necessary, as Indonesia is a country of many peoples, every one people of which may embrace a particular speech society. Second, a verbal social project is usually second or third or fourth to physical or economic development. Although the benefit of CL project is most important, i.e., social harmony, its harmonious situations are usually not seen or reckoned until a social disharmony threatens the unity of a particular nation or country, or the sovereignty of a state.

Probable Contributions for the World Harmony

This CL thesis proposition is aimed at encouraging harmony among members of a speech community. This approach to achieving linguistic harmony is unusual; however, as language use from a speaker to a hearer involves the works of face [3], i.e., interpersonal face as well as social face that should be managed volitionally, socially, and interculturally [4,13-22], this linguistic harmony is worth considering and elaborating. This projected harmony is achieved by applying distant language and close language eligibly by speakers to hearers in verbal interactions. As interactions involve not only verbal texts but also non-verbal texts, still verbal interactions are key to successful as well as harmonious human communication. Distant language and close language for politeness and camaraderie in this CL scheme are an important tool for the world's citizens as well as a precious means for the world harmony, as, we believe in together, human loves harmony and hates disharmony. Harmony is constructive, while disharmony is destructive.

Well-equipped with a CL, a character speaker is able to switch their language to suit eligibly to a situation and to encourage common harmony embraced in that situation. Well-equipped with a CL, with its knowledge of elaborated topics, a citizen is capable of controlling their language use not to threaten others' interpersonal face or social face.

In line with the hegemony of the virtual world today, a character speaker well-equipped with CL is capable of avoiding or at least reducing delivery of hate-speech and hoaxing others, as they get great awareness that threatening interpersonal face and social face of others will potentially destroy the wall of common harmony into ruins of disharmony.

As CL equips the speakers with politeness and camaraderie and with awareness of avoiding impoliteness, both in rude situations and in awkward situations, the teaching and learning of it, and later the acquisition of it, will contribute to interpersonal, communal, social, and, in time, national harmony (p. 347). And, finally, also in time, the world harmony.

Declarations

As to declaration, major concerns were accounted to maintain professional integrity and ethics in this review. Particularly, competing interests, authors' contribution and acknowledgment are addressed.

Competing interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests with regards to authorship and publication.

Author's contributions

The author has made substantial contributions to the formation and design of review and interpretation of the concepts. Furthermore, he has drafted and revised the manuscript accordingly for intellectual content.

Acknowledgement

I would still like to acknowledge all the distinguished people here for contributing their thoughts as well as precious opinions to the linguistic world I have academically lived in. The first group is nine English native speakers: (1) Samantha Custer (New England, US), John Custer (Pennsylvania, US), Bradford Sincock (Michigan, US), Patricia Mary O'Dwyer (South Ireland, GB), Patrick Bradley (Scotland, GB), Simon Colledge (London, UK, GB), Ian Briggs (Northern Territory, Australia), Anastasia de Guise (New South Wales, Australia) and Katrina Michelle Langford (Victoria, Australia). They have inspired me on how a linguist should perform in the linguistic world as well as on how I should learn more to observe people talking and to get real-life lessons for developing the pragmatic world.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the second group of nine Indonesian professionals, Indonesian native speakers, without whom my linguistic world is not as enough as it is today: (1) Putri Mayangsari (freelance interpreter, Jakarta), Ria Herwandari (language consultant, Jakarta), Joseph Poerwono (company manager, Jakarta), Soetanto Hoetomo (school manager, Jakarta), Esther D. Tamtama (lecturer, Semarang), Herni Ambarwati (senior secretary, Semarang), Agus Sururi (hotel manager, Semarang), Didi Pribadi (restaurant manager, Semarang) and Siti Subiantari (liaison/guide, Jakarta).

Last but not least, I owe a lot to former linguists as well as researchers, whose works are both significant and helpful for making this article happen. May God the Almighty be with and bless them all.

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Citation: Jumanto J (2017) A Character Language for the World's Citizens? A Philosophical Review. J Psychol Psychother 7: 319. doi: 10.4172/2161-0487.1000319

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