

Language, Culture and Related Disciplines

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Abstract: The phrase, language is culture and culture is language is often mentioned when language and culture are discussed. It's because the two have a homologous although complex relationship. Language and culture developed together and influenced each other as they evolved. Using this context, Alfred L. Krober, a cultural anthropologist from the United States said that culture started when speech was available, and from that beginning, the enrichment of either one led the other to develop further. If culture is a consequence of the interactions of humans, the acts of communication are their cultural manifestations within a specific community. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, a philosopher from Italy whose work focused on philosophy, semiotics and linguistics said that a speech community is made up of all the messages that were exchanged with one another using a given language, which is understood by the entire society. Rossi-Landi further added that young children learn their language and culture from the society they were born in. In the process of learning, they develop their cognitive abilities as well. According to Professor Michael Silverstein, who teaches psychology, linguistics and anthropology at the University of Chicago, culture's communicative pressure represents aspects of reality as well as connects different contexts. It means that the use of symbols that represent events, identities, feelings and beliefs is also the method of bringing these things into the current context. The aim of the present paper is to shed light on the relation between language and culture and the related disciplines.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Disciplines, Sociolinguistics, Anthropological linguistics, Linguistic Anthropology

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining what we call culture, including conventions, habits and interpretive practices of individuals and communities. Through language we create and share with others identities, categories, attitudes, values and belief structures. The study of how a particular culture uses language can reveal important aspects of sociality and behavior, including how people organize activities, socialize new members, build or resist authority, use literacy tools, worship, argue, and imagine. Language is not only a rule-governed system with its own internal rules and logic (learned by every child in the community), but a system of tools for the constitution of social life and culture (Ager, 1993). For anyone acquiring a new language and approaching a different culture, one of the first seemingly simple lessons to be learned are greetings. However, there are complex skills required in properly using greetings, when to say them, to whom to say them, and in what manner, since greetings do complex social "work," and they reflect and construct complex, multi-faceted relationships. Openings and closings of encounters are rich sites for studying the establishment of social relations and other social work in the construction of society, and how these communicative events vary in their structure and meaning across cultures (Byran, 1989). Each culture classifies not only its activities but also its surroundings into categories such as public and private, teaching or learning environments, burial sites, formal and informal, and so forth. Members of communities learn to interpret these "frames" and what kinds of audiences and language will be appropriate in each frame and how their possible identities will be relevant. New challenges and contexts have arisen

recently through new technologies which can transgress customary frames, for example, with television bringing scenes of places and people, both real and fictional, into the home and with the capability of searching the Internet for many types of knowledge and expertise, and reaching audiences, both intended and unintended, outside the immediate environment.

Language does not simply represent a situation or object which is already there; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of the situation or object, because it is a crucial device for the creation of situations and objects. Speakers use language to create reality by naming and giving meaning to aspects of experience from a particular perspective, thus language has a normalizing and regulative function, as individuals take up particular positions and stances and produce themselves through language. This is a complex process requiring constant work and negotiation. The close analysis of language in particular cultural contexts shows how these meanings are socially and culturally produced, for example, speakers can have quite different and local notions of self and strategies of interpretation (Byran, 1989). Cultures differ in their ideas about who are authorized “speakers” and “hearers” (or, since signed languages are not based on auditory channels, “language producers” and “language receivers”) and about the ability to control interpretation and responsibility for interpretation, for example, the relevance of sincerity and intentionality. As Alessandro Duranti has shown, intentionality and responsibility for meaning can be construed quite differently in different cultures.

Through the use of linguistic and other communicative resources, culturally relevant meanings emerge and are negotiated through messages that are actively responded to. Meaning is a moment-by-moment achievement which links past and present and forms a context for the future. Through language, cultures create particular realities, including a wide variety of social relationships and social systems. Language and culture are linked, for example, in the following areas: in terms of expressing categories such as gender, in marking off certain encounters and contexts as formal such as cultural institutions, the transmission of knowledge, the acquisition of language, of multilingualism, identity, ideologies about language use and its relation to human behavior, literacy, language change, the social valuing of particular language and social practices, the use of technologies, and the aesthetics of language production and social comportment in communicating with others (Duranti, 1997).

Ways of speaking are organized into language genres or categories which can be easily identified by native speakers. Some examples are greetings, lectures, word play, prayer, and conversation. Culturally defined categories or native taxonomies of ways of manipulating communicative symbols are important tools in the analysis of talk, as well as ordering social life and practices, for example, who can say what to whom and in what context. Many cultures share the notion that certain words and phrases are taboo or forbidden in certain contexts or between certain members of society.

Scholars in a diverse array of the social sciences and humanities are interested in the role of language in society and culture. This includes not only linguists, anthropologists and communication scholars, but scholars in ethnomusicology, sociology, psychology, education, cognitive science, media, and performance studies. Many scholars are interested in how language or “discourse” shapes the emergence and dissemination of ideas over time through multiple contexts, genres, and modalities. Spoken language, written texts, and other symbolic forms are important in creating and maintaining cultural practices. Even referential meanings can take on important cultural characteristics, as when a phrase like “apple pie,” a common dessert in

some locales, becomes a signifier for a model home and family. This added signifying and building of common cultural values is a process involving 'connotative' meaning. This is different from 'denotative' meaning, which is the link to something 'real' in the world in less abstract sense (pie). Advertisers make extensive use of connotative meanings. Using the name of an animal such as jaguar for a brand of car, for example, adds the connotative meanings of powerful, fast, and beautiful. This would be in contrast to the connotative meanings of 'pig' in certain culture (Asante, 1990).

1. Cultural Definitions of Language

An important question is what constitutes communicative competence in particular cultures and the notion of language, performance, and participation. There is a whistled language called *el silbo* in the Canary Islands, and smoke signals were once used to communicate over long distances. Language can be defined broadly to include all forms of speech, signing, writing, song, drumming, horn calling, gesturing, and so forth. In the case of signed languages, properties of a visual language modality include not only the manual sign system. Facial expression also conveys important grammatical, affective, and other information. Non-manual expressions such as head movement and eye movement convey important meanings. Some signers in the U.S. also use the mouth in certain conventionalized ways, including in some cases to form the shape of English words together with American Sign Language (ASL) as another resource for adding meaning. Although grammatical structures are often privileged in the formal study of language, intonation is a crucial feature in spoken languages influencing how people communicate emotion or affect and other meanings, such as enthusiasm or boredom. Intonation is a complex combination of rhythm, volume, and pitch overlaying entire utterances. It is heard by listeners as relative changes in prosodic features. There are important interfaces between verbal and visual codes, which are not yet well understood. So-called "non verbal behavior" or body language, for example, can be an important tool for indicating status as well as emotion and attitude. The role of space in communication can be very important, for example, who is allowed to be in what spaces and who sits where can affect rights and opportunities to talk. Gestures convey important information and can even replace words and serve as an entire communication, but can also be sanctioned in certain contexts, and vary considerable cross-culturally in form, expression, and appropriateness of use (Keating, 2021).

There are universal aspects of language and language use and aspects that are entirely culture specific. For example, some languages have a means for grammatically marking status relations, as in the well-known examples of the French *tu/vous* and German *du/Sie* as well as the far more complex Japanese honorific system, but all societies differentiate between specified roles and relations through language. This can take the form of address forms (titles) which delineate marital status, occupation, or gender, or can take other forms. In the case of grammatically marked status, speakers can indicate their own or others' status by choosing specific linguistic elements. A single utterance in Pohnpeian, a Micronesian language, can index two separate levels of status aimed at two separate individuals, and one participant's status can be differently constructed by two different speakers in the same interaction. Speakers often face difficulties in deciding which grammatical forms to use to convey relative social position, since a wrong choice can offend the addressee, or indicate incompetence on the part of the user. Even when grammatical forms for expressing social status are not present in a language, utterances can be

designed to signal deference and hierarchy . As Dell Hymes pointed out any general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning (Gumperz, Hymes, 1972).

2. Language and communication

Language always carries meanings and references beyond itself: The meanings of a particular language represent the culture of a particular social group. To interact with a language means to do so with the culture which is its reference point. We could not understand a culture without having direct access to its language because of their intimate connection.

A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. Learning a language, therefore, is not only learning the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural customs. Thus; language teaching should always contain some explicit reference to the culture, the whole from which the particular language is extracted.

The human communication process is complex, as many of our messages are transmitted through paralinguistic. These auxiliary communication techniques are culture-specific, so communication with people from other societies or ethnic groups is fraught with the danger of misunderstanding, if the larger framework of culture is ignored.

Growing up in a particular society, we informally learn how to use gestures, glances, slight changes in tone or voice, and other auxiliary communication devices to alter or to emphasize what we say and do. We learn these culturally specific techniques over many years, largely by observing and imitating.

The most obvious form of paralinguistic is body language, or Kinesics, which is the language of gestures, expressions, and postures. However, the meaning of words can also be altered by tone and character of voice.

3. Language is culture and culture is language

Language and culture have a complex, homologous relationship. Language is complexly intertwined with culture (they have evolved together, influencing one another in the process, ultimately shaping what it means to be human). In this context, A. L. Kroeber (1923) said, “culture, then, began when speech was present, and from then on, the enrichment of either means the further development of the other.”

If culture is a product of human interaction, cultural manifestations are acts of communication that are assumed by particular speech communities. According to Rossi Landi (1973), “the totality of the messages we exchange with one another while speaking a given language constitutes a speech community, that is, the whole society understood from the point of view of speaking.” He further explains that all children learn their language from their societies, and during the process of learning a language also learn their culture and develop their cognitive abilities.

Language communicates through culture and culture also communicates through language: Michael Silverstein proposed that the communicative force of culture works not only in representing aspects of reality, but also in connecting one context with another. That is, communication is not only the use of symbols that “stand for” beliefs, feelings, identities, or events, it is also a way of bringing beliefs, feelings, and identities into the present context.

According to the linguistic relativity principle, the way in which we think about the world is directly influenced by the language we use to talk about it. “The real world is, to a large extent,

unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever so similar that they represent the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct, not merely the same with a different label attached” (Edward Sapir, 1929). Therefore, to speak is to assume a culture, and to know a culture is like knowing a language. Language and culture are homologous mental realities. Cultural products are representations and interpretations of the world that must be communicated in order to be lived.

The problem lies in what happens when cross-cultural interactions take place, i.e., when message producer and message receiver are from different cultures. Contact among cultures is increasing and intercultural communication is imperative for anyone wanting to get along with and understand those whose beliefs and backgrounds may be vastly different from their own.

Language can mark the cultural identity, but it is also used to refer to other phenomena and refer beyond itself, especially when a particular speaker uses it to explain intentions. A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. We can therefore presume that language learning is cultural learning, so language teaching is cultural teaching due to the interdependence of language and cultural learning.

Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral conventions, basic assumptions, and values that are shared by a group of people and that influence each member’s behavior and each member’s interpretations of the meanings of other people’s behavior. And language is the medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society share by virtue of their socialization into it. Language also refers to objects peculiar to a given culture, as evidenced by proper names which embody those objects. Byran posited that “a loaf of bread” evokes a specific culture of objects in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one. So, we can conclude that language is a part of culture and through it, we can express cultural beliefs and values, and that the specific usages of a given word are peculiar to a language and its relationship with culture.

In fact, language teaching means, inevitably, language and cultural teaching. According to Buttjst, “Culture learning is actually a key factor in being able to use and master a foreign linguistic system.” The Bellagio Declaration of the European Cultural Foundation and the International Council for Educational Development states, “For effective international cooperation, knowledge of other countries and their cultures is as important as proficiency in their languages and such knowledge is dependent on foreign language teaching.”

Learning a language is therefore learning the behavior of a given society and its cultural customs. Language is a product of the thought and behavior of a society. An individual language speaker’s effectiveness in a foreign language is directly related to his/her understanding of the culture of that language (Taylor, 1979), and it is possible to consider teaching culture through learners’ own languages, which can be used in a specific way to interpret the other culture (Ager).

Finally, we can conclude that immersion teaching accelerates the acquisition of cultural knowledge: “...the integration of language and culture learning by using the language as medium for the continuing socialization of students is a process which is not intended to imitate and replicate the socialization of native-speaker teachers but rather to develop student’s cultural competence from its existing stage, by changing it into intercultural competence” (Fengping Gao).

4. Language, culture and sociolinguistics

Language is probably the most important instrument of socialization that exists in all human societies and cultures. It is largely by means of language that one generation passes on to the next its myths, laws, customs, and beliefs, and it is largely by means of language that the child comes to appreciate the structure of the society into which he is born and his own place in that society. **Sociolinguistics** is the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and society's effect on language. It differs from sociology of language, which focuses on the effect of language on society.

As a social force, language serves both to strengthen the links that bind the members of the same group and to differentiate the members of one group from those of another. In many countries there are social dialects as well as regional dialects, so that it is possible to tell from a person's speech not only where he comes from but what class he belongs to. In some instances social dialects can transcend regional dialects. This is notable in England, where Standard English in the so-called Received Pronunciation (RP) can be heard from members of the upper class and upper middle class in all parts of the country. The example of England is but an extreme manifestation of a tendency that is found in all countries: there is less regional variation in the speech of the higher than in that of the lower socioeconomic classes. In Britain and the United States and in most of the other English-speaking countries, people will almost always use the same dialect, regional or social, however formal or informal the situation and regardless of whether their listeners speak the same dialect or not. (Relatively minor adjustments of vocabulary may, however, be made: an Englishman speaking to an American may employ the word "elevator" rather than "lift" and so on.) In many communities throughout the world, it is common for members to speak two or more different dialects and to use one dialect rather than another in a particular social situation. This is commonly referred to as code-switching. Code-switching may operate between two distinct languages (e.g., Spanish and English among Puerto Ricans in New York) as well as between two dialects of the same language. The term diglossia (rather than bilingualism) is frequently used by sociolinguists to refer to this by no means uncommon phenomenon.

In every situation, what one says and how one says it depends upon the nature of that situation, the social role being played at the time, one's status vis-à-vis that of the person addressed, one's attitude towards him, and so on. Language interacts with nonverbal behaviour in social situations and serves to clarify and reinforce the various roles and relationships important in a particular culture. Sociolinguistics is far from having satisfactorily analyzed or even identified all the factors involved in the selection of one language feature rather than another in particular situations. Among those that have been discussed in relation to various languages are: the formality or informality of the situation; power and solidarity relationships between the participants; differences of sex, age, occupation, socioeconomic class, and educational background; and personal or transactional situations. Terms such as style and register (as well as a variety of others) are employed by many linguists to refer to the socially relevant dimensions of phonological, grammatical, and lexical variation within one language. So far there is very little agreement as to the precise application of such terms.

5. Anthropological linguistics

The fundamental concern of anthropological linguistics is to investigate the relationship between language and culture. To what extent the structure of a particular language is determined by or determines the form and content of the culture with which it is associated remains a controversial question. Vocabulary differences between languages correlate obviously enough with cultural differences, but even here the interdependence of language and culture is not so strong that one can argue from the presence or absence of a corresponding cultural difference. For example, from the fact that English—unlike French, German, Russian, and many other languages—distinguishes lexically between monkeys and apes, one cannot conclude that there is an associated difference in the cultural significance attached to these animals by English-speaking societies. Some of the major grammatical distinctions in certain languages may have originated in culturally important categories (e.g., the distinction between an animate and an inanimate gender). But they seem to endure independently of any continuing cultural significance. The “Whorfian hypothesis” (the thesis that one’s thought and even perception are determined by the language one happens to speak), in its strong form at least, is no longer debated as vigorously as it was a few years ago. Anthropologists continue to draw upon linguistics for the assistance it can give them in the analysis of such topics as the structure of kinship. A later development, but one that has not so far produced any very substantial results, is the application of notions derived from generative grammar to the analysis of ritual and other kinds of culturally prescribed behaviour.

6. The difference between sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics

“Anthropological linguistics is that sub-field of linguistics which is concerned with the place of language in its wide social and cultural context, its role in forging and sustaining cultural practice and social structures....[it] views language through the prism of the core anthropological concept, culture, and, as such, seeks to uncover the meaning behind the use, misuse or non-use of languages, its different forms, register and styles...” (Foley 1997: 3)

“Sociolinguistics...views language as a social institution, one of those institutions within which individuals and groups carry out social interaction. It seeks to discover how linguistic behaviour patterns with respect to social groupings and correlates differences in linguistic behaviour with the variables defining social groups, such as age, sex, class, race, etc.” (Foley 1997: 3)

- Anthropological Linguistics is a subfield of linguistics, while Linguistic Anthropology is a subfield of anthropology.
- Anthropological linguists, being linguists, tend to focus on specific linguistic structures (e.g. parts of “grammar”) despite sharing a lot in terms of interest, framework, and method with anthropologists.
- Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics are interested in the cultural and social aspects of language, but differ mainly in their signature research methods.
- Anthropological Linguistics: more like anthropology, and emphasizes fieldwork (ideally, long term) and participant observation.
- Sociolinguistics: more like sociology, and collecting survey responses, running stats, and seeking correlations systematically.

As the terms are currently used, the distinction concerns the methods used in both disciplines. Some other differences are that sociolinguistics typically works more in urban environments and linguistic anthropology typically with smaller communities; linguistic anthropology looks more to other branches of anthropology (especially cultural anthropology) whereas sociolinguistics traditionally tackles more linguistically questions, especially those motivated by the study of sound change; sociolinguists tend to know and care more about linguistic forms (particularly phonology) whereas linguistic anthropologists care more about social meaning; and so on.

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