

Resemblance Between Language and Culture: Sociolinguistics Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the paper, the first language learners fascinated in their own culture, associates between language and culture based on sociolinguistics often does not come to question and second or foreign language learners, where true cultural facts and understandings are situated well beyond the textbook, an understanding of language guesses a very different shape. While it is feasible to divide language and culture, one has to question the legitimacy and insinuations such separation brings. This paper also initiates the ideas of language and culture, and investigates the viability of their relationship based on the three possible relationships proposed by Wardhaugh (i.e. the structure of the language determines the way we use language, cultural values determine language usage, and the neutral claim that a relationship does not exist). The significance of cultural proficiency is then considered for its importance to language education and the implications it holds for language learning and policy in the societal perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Relationship between language and culture is important for language learners, users, and for all those engaged in language education. For language teachers and learners in general, a pleasure for the differences in attitude regarding the relationship between language and culture can help to illuminate the variety of views held toward the use of language. Moreover, insight into the various views can help not only second language learners but also first language users, as the way we choose to use language is not just important for some of us. Such insights also open the door for a deliberation of how both language and culture manipulate people's life awareness, and how people make use of their pre-acquainted linguistic and cultural knowledge to assess those perceptions. For all language users, the appreciation of how their language affects others can greatly impact the direction and inspiration for both language study and interpersonal relationships, and it can also add great insight and value to language education, program planning, and curriculum development. This paper begins by introducing the concepts of language and culture, and then considers the connection between the two through the three plausible relationships forwarded by Wardhaugh: language structure determines language usage, cultural values determine the way we use language, and the claim that a relationship between the two does not exist. In the latter part of the paper, the implications of such a relationship are discussed as they pertain to language education and policy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are as follow:

- a. To explore the language-culture relationship in the context of sociolinguistics
- b. To recognize human's cognitive processes
- c. To cram society and man's position in it are sociology
- d. To reflect the necessity for linguistic and cultural proficiency
- e. To show the gender-related language variation

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wardhaugh and Thanasoulas each define language in a somewhat different way, with the former explaining it for what it does, and the latter viewing it as it relates to culture. Wardhaugh (2002, p. 2) defines language to be: a knowledge of rules and principles and of the ways of saying and doing things with sounds, words, and sentences rather than just knowledge of specific sounds, words, and sentences.

While Wardhaugh does not mention culture per se, the speech acts we perform are inevitably connected with the environment they are performed in, and therefore he appears to define language with consideration for context, something Thanasoulas (2001) more directly compiled in the following: (language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives (Sapir, 1970, p. 207). In a sense, it is 'a key to the

cultural past of a society' (Salzmann, 1998, p. 41), a guide to 'social reality' (Sapir, 1929, p. 209, cited in Salzmann, 1998, p. 41).

And if we are to discuss an association between language and culture, we must also have some understanding of what culture refers to. Goodenough (1957, p. 167, taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 219) explains culture in terms of the participatory responsibilities of its members. He states that a society's culture is made up of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.

Malinowski (Stern, 2009) views culture through a somewhat more interactive design, stating that it is a response to need, and believes that what constitutes a culture is its response to three sets of needs: the basic needs of the individual, the instrumental needs of the society, and the symbolic and integrative needs of both the individual and the society.

METHODOLOGY

The research is based on secondary sources of data. The information has been collected from library, facts, textbooks, journals, reports and other internet sources to depict the results. All the data are studied sincerely to achieve the objectives of the study.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Language and Society

From the above definitions of culture it can be noted that one of the central elements in them is that culture is realized within society or a social group. Probably the most important instrument of socialization that exists in all human societies and cultures is language. It is largely by means of language that one generation passes on to the next its customs and beliefs, and by which members of a society come to be aware of their place in it. Some of the major disciplines studying society and man's position in it are sociology, anthropology and ethnology. The area where they touch upon language is the true province of linguistic disciplines such as anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and ethno linguistics.

The Correlation between Language and Culture

Edward Sapir, in his studies with Benjamin Lee Whorf, recognized the close relationship between language and culture, concluding that it was not possible to understand or appreciate one without knowledge of the other" (taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 220). However, Wardhaugh (2002, pp. 219- 220) reported that there appear to be three claims to the relationship between language and culture.

But is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language toward adopting their world-view The culture of a people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do. Sociolinguists are commonly associated with Sapir and Whorf. This claim is the basis for much research on the

relationship between language and culture and therefore will be covered in the most detail following an acknowledgement of the other two, beginning with a brief consideration of the 'neutral claim'.

The second proposed relationship suggests that people in a culture use language that reflects their particular culture's values. This is the opposing view of Sapir and Whorf in that here it is the 'thoughts' of a culture which are reflected in the language and not the language which determines the thought. This claim implies that cultures employ languages that are as different as the cultures that speak them and therefore linguistic functions differ in terms of, for example, a culture's level of technological development. However, Wardhaugh (2002, pp. 225-226) argues that we must assume that all languages possess the resources to allow any speaker to say anything... provided that speaker is willing to use some degree of circumlocution. When needs for lexical items arise, Wardhaugh (2002, p. 225) explains, we can assume that cultures possess the ability and are free to create or to borrow them as needed, and that cultures that have not done so have not yet experienced the need. Wardhaugh also notes that people who speak languages with different structures (e.g. Germans and Hungarians) can share similar cultural characteristics, and people who have different cultures can also possess similar structures in language (e.g. Hungarians and Finns). Examples like these indicate that the second relationship between language and culture is quite viable.

The first of the three proposed relationships from above is the basis for the Whorfian hypothesis; the belief that the structure of the language determines how people see the world. The idea that language, to some extent, determines the way we think about the world around us is known as linguistic determinism, with 'strong' determinism stating that language actually determines thought, and 'weak' determinism implying that our thought is merely influenced by our language (Campbell, 1997). Strong linguistic determinism and the idea that difference in language results in difference in thought, or linguistic relativity, were the basic propositions for the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. The hypothesis claims that we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Sapir 1929b, p. 207, taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 220).

In consideration of the various researches, it does appear that the structure of a language determines how speakers of that language view their world. A look at how users of different languages view color, linguistic etiquette and kinship systems helps to illustrate this point.

Lucy (1996, p. 46, taken from Skotko, 1997) reported that Hanunóo, a language from the Philippines, has four terms that seem to refer to what we would call white, black, green, and red but which under further analysis turn out to mean roughly lightness, darkness, wetness, and dryness. Such observations imply that some cultures interpret colors based on their language, such as with Hanunóo, where it appears that speakers view the color red as more of a feeling than a color.

Alternatively, Wardhaugh (2002, p. 234) reports another theory that claims all people approach the color spectrum in the same cognitive way and it is the development of a culture that creates the demands for differentiation. Nevertheless, Lucy (1997, taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 234) asserts that communicatively relevant encodings of visual experience lie in socially anchored linguistic systems. Skoto also observes (based on Lucy's report regarding the cross-cultural pinwheel of color study by Brown, Lenneberg, and others) that the cross-cultural pinwheel of color linguistics has shown that grammatical structure can influence thoughts and interpretations (Lucy, 1996, p. 47 taken from Skotko, 1997). Linguistic etiquette has also been studied for its possible influence on user perceptions. Kasper (1997, p. 385) emphasizes the role of linguistic etiquette in cultures claiming it to be a shaper of both communicative contexts as well as human relationships. Though linguistic norms differ between cultures, demonstrating respect towards others is an important function of language. To help clarify this point, politically correct and sexist language has been studied in order to understand whether this language determines the perceptions of the users. And, in spite of claims to the affirmative, it is not conclusive whether certain language causes sexism or vice versa ("Sexism: Language," 2005). Furthermore, studies of whether changes in politically (in) correct language result in changes in perception have also been inconclusive ("Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," 2005). And, although the perceptions of listeners appear to be affected by this language, a relationship claiming that language determines this type of thought remains in question.

Kinship systems have similarly been studied to discover how language is related to thought through the ways in which the use of terms like father, brother, or older brother reflect how people behave toward these people (Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 229). Hudson (1996, pp. 85-86, taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, pp. 228-229) reports that the Seminole Indians of Florida and Oklahoma recognize a 'father's brother' to also be 'father', as the Seminole recognize same sex siblings to fulfill the same role. While one culture may distinguish between father and uncle, another may not. The use of the term 'father' in a conversation between a native English speaker and a Seminole Indian would logically produce a different image for both people, as culturally each may classify the roles and image of this person differently.

Whereas strong determinism states that language determines thought, weak determinism allows the 'needed' room for additional influences to enter into the relationship between language and culture. Notwithstanding individual cognitive processes or general knowledge, it is fair to assume that worldviews may be influenced by culture and not just language. Although language structure provides us with phrasings for our understanding and can manipulate our thoughts in this respect, if preexisting knowledge does not supply a foundation for general understanding, the ways in which we define and evaluate each individual encounter would be left solely to linguistic knowledge.

Turner (1994, pp. 15-22 taken from Nishida 1999, p. 760) states that people use schemata to help recognize situations, create strategies for addressing them, apply the strategies, and then deal with the resulting actions in the same manner. If we were to verbalize this actual process, it would obviously be our language that would restrict how we would express ourselves, but the fact that we are not able to express every thought and feeling involved in every situation does not imply that we lack those thoughts and feelings. Since this type of process is encountered repeatedly in daily life, it might be over simplistic to assume that it is only language that restricts us from thinking a particular way. We must assume that meaning and intelligibility are at least partially determined by the situation, and the prior experience of speakers (Gumperz, 1977, taken from SavilleTroike, 1997, p. 138).

As educators, a recognition that a relationship between language and culture does exist brings us to consider how this understanding can apply to language education and language policy.

Implications for Language, Education and Language Policy

The ultimate goals of language education for both learners and instructors revolve around the acquisition of competency. As illustrated above, language and thought interact constantly and linguistic competence is not enough for learners to be competent in that language (Krasner, 1999, taken from Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). Understanding that languages and their cultures do possess relationships central to the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competency is a good starting point for any approach to language education. The creation and enforcement of an integrated language policy that reflects the need for learners to be educated about both target culture(s) and language(s) is needed if language learners are to be expected to achieve any degree of real competency in any language.

For instructors and learners alike, the concepts of linguistic and cultural competence must be introduced into the classroom together. Their relationship would also serve best clarified and understood from the onset. Showing language in its natural environment is no easy task in many foreign language classrooms, but as Peck (1998 taken from Thanasoulas, 2001) notes, beginning foreign language students want to feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language. Even beginning language learners are aware that there is more to language than grammar, and often it may be the widespread teaching practice that language understanding equals actual language competency that leaves learners questioning their awareness and leads them to struggle with language studies.

In language education it is not a matter of instructors explaining or telling learners 'how it is', it is important to let learners make informed observations such as ethnographers would. By recognizing firsthand the power of language and paralinguistic consistent with one's own culture in another culture, learners gain the ability to see beyond apparent case specific knowledge. They then realize the underlying processes which

speakers of a language utilize to produce and interpret communicative experiences, including unstated assumptions which are shared cultural knowledge and understandings (Garfinkel, 1967, 1972, taken from Saville-Troike, 1997).

For language programs, a language policy would best be implemented in the form of required curriculum emphasizing the integrated study of language and culture. While the incorporation of cultural learning would be an ideal constant in language policy, languages with restricted use such as Esperanto would be realistically very difficult to attach to a culture. While the focus of foreign language learning is clearly on the foreign language and culture, language policy should also include a study concerning the awareness of learners' native language and culture: foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, and possess the ability to experience and analyze both the home and target cultures (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994, p. 73, taken from Thanasoulas, 2001).

Sociolinguistics

While anthropological linguistics and ethno linguistics focus on the relationship between language and some particular aspects of social life and social roles, sociolinguistics is supposed to investigate all aspects of this relationship in the society as a whole. With the starting assumptions that all language events consist of a piece of language in a social context and that every different social context determines a particular form of language (Stockwell 2002:5), the potential scope of sociolinguistics is enormous. It studies how language is used in a living and complex speech community, from micro sociolinguistic issues dealing with correlations between language variation and use and social groups and situations, to macro sociolinguistic issues such as social attitudes to language, the patterns and needs of national language use, etc. The latter approach, which focuses more on the role of language in society and suggests a greater concern with sociological rather than linguistic explanations, is also known as the sociology of language. One of the key issues here concerns multilingualism and bilingualism, in a social group as well as in an individual speaker, as the most obvious cases of language variation. To the already discussed relation between language and ethnic identity, language rights of minorities, and political factors accompanying these issues, we should add the notions of pidgins and creoles, standard and vernacular languages, language loyalty, diglossia, code switching and code mixing, and language accommodation. They basically refer to various social situations and language behaviors where the speakers are exposed to or forced or willing to use more than one language, or a variety of language or speech.

Some further manifestations of language variation are sometimes less obvious to identify distinctly. They include regional dialects and social dialects, reflecting that in many communities it is possible to tell from a person's speech not only where (s)he comes from but also what class (s)he belongs to, although there seems to be a general tendency that the speech

of the higher classes demonstrates less regional variation (cf. Trudgill 1990, Labov 1966, 1972, 2001).

Also important is the gender-related language variation, the field of study which has especially flourished in the past couple of decades. There are various ways in which the linguistic behavior of men and women from the same speech community differs – pronunciation, vocabulary, conversational practices, etc. For example, several studies have found that women tend to be more polite, and use more of the standard forms of language, which is frequently explained by their social class awareness, their role in society, or their status in general as a subordinate group (Coates 1986, 1998, Holmes 1995, Tannen 1996).

While these aspects of the socially relevant language variations focus mostly on language users, their ethnicity, gender, social background, etc., there are some aspects which primarily focus on language use, reflecting particular contexts. The way people talk in court, in school, at business meetings, for instance, is more formal than the relaxed language they use at home or with people they know well. Similar differences are noticeable when we speak to people of a different age or social group. Such language variations are generally known as style, or stylistic differences, although the term register is also used. However, it is better to restrict the latter term to distinctive styles shaped by functional demands of specific situations or occupations – a sports announcer talk, for instance, or a group of specialists, e.g. cardiologists, computer programmers, carpenters, etc., talking about their specialty.

FINDINGS

The most important findings of the study are as follow:

- a. Society is the source of language.
- b. Language and culture are associated.
- c. Language that reflects their particular culture's values.
- d. The ultimate goals of language education for both learners and instructors revolve around the acquisition of competency.
- e. Sociolinguistics is supposed to investigate all aspects of this relationship in the society as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendations of the study are as follow:

- a. Language culture relationship should be institutionalized.
- b. Language using in every where should be easy and effective.
- c. Linguistics fields should be clear and transparent.
- d. Using of sociolinguistics phenomenon should be regularized.
- e. Language culture relationship with other societal elements should be closer.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this overview of the relationship between the study of language and the study of culture, it should be noted that, though informative in its intent, it has, nevertheless, been inevitably rather selective and far from exhaustive. Our aim was to point to the areas where the study of language and the study of culture most markedly overlap, such as language and society, language use, and language and thought, and various linguistic disciplines studying them, as well as to draw attention to some ways language reflects and determines various networks of social and cognitive relationships in the world around us. If language policy reflects the need for learners to become socially competent language users, learners will be able to better understand their own language and culture as well as any other they may choose to study. For language learners and instructors alike, an acknowledgement that there is more to any language (i.e. 'the ways of...') than the sum of its parts is imperative if any level of real competency is to be achieved. Creating language policy that reflects the importance of the relationship(s) between language and culture will force teachers to educate learners on the authenticity of language (i.e. the how and why behind its use in real life). Such policy would not only offer language learners insight into their own language and cultural competency, but also provide them with an educated base for how to view other languages and cultures as well. With the unfortunate realities of time and budgetary constraints at the forefront of language education, judgments inevitably have to be made concerning the role of cultural education in the second language classroom. And, as strong evidence ties together culture and language, creating a program reflective of this relationship should be nothing short of top priority.

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