

Language and Culture

In any particular community, the existence of the culture is always supported by the human specific means of communication, i.e. language. Language is not just semantics, language goes beyond than what the uttered utterances or the scripted papers can hold. Language does not end at the sense or the usage of words linked to a culture. Words themselves represent history, beliefs, and permanently the culture of their origin which is partly acquired and mostly inherited and also learned to be used appropriately in relevant contexts.

The connection between language and culture is inveterate and profoundly rooted. The total intertwining of this maintained interconnection initiates at one's birth. Language is used to convey culture and preserve cultural ties. However any discussion of the relationship between language and culture, or culture role in language learning has begun with some attempt to define the perplexing relationship.

1. Interconnectedness between Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is viewed from three opposite angles:

- First language may be observed as tightly and closely correlated with a culture: language and culture as inseparable phenomena.
- On the other hand, language and culture are viewed as widely independent phenomena considering language as a means of communication that can be used anywhere at any time and in any sphere in a way that is not connected with culture.
- Between the two perspectives, language and culture are partly interconnected.

However, any theory that claims that language and culture are separated turned to be

neglected and unaccepted.

2. Culture as a Part of Language

As stated by Sapir (1921), “*language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols.*” Risgar (2006) claims that Language is a part of culture and a part of epidermal behavior. It is predominantly held that the task of language is to put thoughts into words, to communicate pieces of information and to express feelings. Language fulfills many other functions as maintaining friendly societal relationship between people such as greeting people, expressing needs ...etc.

In this area of study Kramsch (1962) phrased the main functions of language in three aspects:

- Language is the primary vehicle of communication.
- Language reflects both the personality of the individual and the culture of his history. In turn, it helps shaping both personality and culture.
- Language makes possible the growth and transmission of culture, the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social group.

There is no question about the issue that language is a big part of the culture. The primary obligation about learning a foreign country's culture is learning to speak, read and write the local language, in order to be able to communicate with the native people and doing such thing makes one realize that without a pure knowledge of the language you cannot really learn about a country's culture if you do not learn the language. One cannot fully understand a culture. It is a whole package.

As a matter of fact, the ability to communicate with other people from a distant cultural background (Europe) is a priceless experience as you get to know how these people live, how and why families interact the way they do, why they have certain traditions that for Arabic people may seem odd, shameless or even in-acceptable. In the

name of cultural differences what may be rude for us is not necessary the case in other cultures and vice-versa.

In Addition to this, every language has its very own subtleties which, most of the time, cannot be translated. One can constantly translate items but at times, if not frequently, you will lose the gist, the essence. In case of translating foreign movies to standard Arabic ,or transposing religious items like "Sunna" interpretation to English. The checking of the subtitles often reveals a playing on the difficult words to translate , sadly enough lost in translation . This phenomenon if it indicates something it indicates the diversity and the cultural distinguished features of a country that made of it unique.

In addition, many verbal expressions/idioms reflect a way of life and its importance on the people. In case of French idiomatic expressions, we notice the intensity of the colloquialisms that have to do with nutrition (food and drink). It may seem wonder ,this is simply because it reflects one cultural reality about French society which is the cherishment of enjoying meals with family and friends or even alone (les plaisirs de table) it is in fact one of the most happy pleasurable activities of life for French speakers.

Another concerning example it is nicely and preferably to congratulate the hostess for a delicious meal for lunch or dinner invitation in most Arabic culture as in Asian traditions saying words of thanks and admire while it is taken as unfavorable and rude in western cultures to thank the cook for a good meal .

These few aforementioned realistic illustrations may exemplify the cultural diversity all over the world and explain the necessity to be aware of the importance of learning other languages at least to try to maintain a decent, friendly conversation with local habitants through an enough understanding of the native language properties.

Subsequently, the modality and the uses of a given language reflect the cultural value of the society in which the language is spoken .It is evident that acquiring linguistic qualifications solely is not sufficient to master this language professionally. Watching every day experience in communicating indicates that members of a society use

dissimilar slangs and vernacular to interact with each other.

Hence, the process of learning foreign language need to be accompanied with the acquaintance of cultural convenient ways to address people, make request to express thank and gratitude ,and the appropriate forms of agreement and disagreement with someone ,the suitable behaviors and intonation styles that are relevant in a the target language speech community that are perceived distantly varied from the local language.

Linguists and anthropologists assume that a foreign language learner has to understand that in order to run a successful communication, language must be associated with culturally adequate attitudes. From this, it is accurate to say that: "***Language and culture cannot be separated. Language is vital to understanding our unique cultural perspectives. Language is a tool that is used to explore and experience our cultures and the perspectives that are embedded in our cultures.***" Buffy Sainte-Marie quotes (American Singer and Song Writer, b.1941)

Many scholars stress the close connection between language and culture, according to Brown (2000:177) : "***a language is a part of culture ,and a culture is a part of culture ,the two are intricately in interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture***". Bryam(1889:94) appends that: "***the language holds the culture through the denotations and connotations of its semantics***"that is why it is paramount to teach culture through its language.

3. Ways how Language and Culture are bound together

Kramersch (1998: 3) points out three ways in which culture and language are related:

- First, through verbal communication members of a society convey the cultural actuality. The correct arrangement of words not only expresses ideas but also reflect manners and attitudes.
- Second, language embodies cultural reality, people provide significance to their daily life experiments through language.

- Third, culture symbolizes cultural reality (members of a community view their local language as a symbol of their cultural identity: “*When [language] is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture ... [and] Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity.*” Kramsch (1998: 3).

In other words, language is a vehicle for people to communicate with their peers and convey meaning into their social and cultural reality.

4. Language, Culture and Thought

To a certain extent the way we think and interpret things is shaped by the morals, attitudes, traditions and whole way of living in the community we grow up in. Hence, it is natural to assume that our whole style of thinking is affected by the language which we use. Individuals from distinct cultures speak distinct languages. This means that people, who talk, for instance, Arabic, see things differently than people who talk English, French or Chinese. In other words, language leads our way of thinking.

Benjamin Lee Whorf in his theory of linguistic relativity stresses that language plays a paramount role in shaping the way we think, and it pinpoints what we think. He considers that we view the world differently depending on the language we speak. His best illustrative example was the comparison between the term snow of an English person and an Eskimo person. The Eskimo has more than 50 words to describe snow, while the English has only one. For instance, an Eskimo describes the wet snow, as the snow currently falling and so on. Therefore, an Eskimo perceives the snow in a different way than an English person. For instance: *tlacringit* refers to snow that is crusted on the surface, *blotla*: blowing snow, *layinq*: snow mixed with mud, *wa-ter*: melted snow... In spite of the fact that, Benjamin's theory is not yet totally clarified it is valid to say that language could make some ways of thinking easier.