

Cultural diversity and information and communication impacts on Language Learning

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Abstract

Cultural diversity doesn't just entail differences in dress and language. It also encompasses different ways of thinking, managing, and communicating. The relationship between communication and culture is a very complex and intimate one. Cultures are created through communication; that is, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural characteristics are created and shared. People use language for purposeful communication and learning a new language involves learning how to use words, rules and knowledge about language and its use in order to communicate with speakers of the language. In this paper, the first section attempts to illustrate communications and culture transformation; the second section focuses on the ways in which people's world-views affect languages' learning, understanding, and interaction; the third section discusses the diverse cultural stratifications between eastern and western cultures' values.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Communication, Learning, Cultural stratifications

1. Introduction

Culture is a word with many shades of meaning. It is defined in Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics as the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society. Indeed, the origin of language, understood as the human capacity of complex symbolic communication, and the origin of complex culture is often thought to stem from the same evolutionary process in early man. Culture is a word with many shades of meaning. It is defined in Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics as the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behavior, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society. The specifics of the relationship between language change and cultural change are mediated by an intricate array of factors, including local cultural resources, rights, and persons and the ways that local details of drift in language change are linked to these by language ideologies. Language and culture then both emerged as a means of using symbols to construct social identity and maintain coherence within a social group too large to rely exclusively on pre-human ways of building community such as for example grooming. Since language and culture are both in essence symbolic systems, twentieth century cultural theorists have applied the methods of

analyzing language developed in the science of linguistics to also analyze culture. Hence, culture is more than a collection of disconnected acts and beliefs; rather, it should be seen as an integrated set of norms or standards by which human behaviors, beliefs, and thinking are organized.

In general terms, culture is most commonly viewed as that pattern of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs, as well as material artifacts, produced by a human society and transmitted from one generation to another. Cultural pluralism is referred to as an idea that seeks to encourage cultural diversity and establishes a basis of unity so that America can become a cohesive society whose culture is enriched by sharing widely divergent ethnic experiences (Pai, 1990). Foley (1997) culture itself as well as the study of culture would have to undergo certain changes or face becoming obsolete. Symbolic anthropology is considered to be one of such transformations regarding the theoretical interpretation cultural anthropologists are concerned with. This would suggest that culture and language are inseparable by nature if one were to take into account the notion that the meanings of a word are structured around cultural practice and are therefore constrained to that culture. Cultural similarity in perception makes the sharing of meaning possible. There is probably no definitive answer explaining why a particular culture assigns certain meanings and worth to a given set of events, objects, or acts. It is essential to cultivate an attitude of respect for and appreciation of worth of cultural diversity, to promote belief in worth of the individual, to develop competencies, and to facilitate educational equity (Pai, 1990). The difference between languages does not consist only in differences in pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar, but also in different “cultures of speaking”. Other languages may use different forms of address when speaking to speakers of the opposite gender or in-law relatives and many languages have special ways of speaking to infants and children. Among other groups, the culture of speaking may entail not speaking to particular people.

2. Communication and Cultural Diversity

Culture and communication, although two different concepts, are directly linked. Communication the ability to share each other’s ideas and feelings is the basis of all human contact, while culture is learned, acted out, transmitted, and preserved through communication. The essential way to live in societies and to maintain one’s culture is to communicate. The relationship between communication and culture is a very complex and intimate one. Cultures are created through communication; that is, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural characteristics are created and shared. It is not so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationships, groups, organizations, or societies, but rather that cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction. Hymes (1974) has proposed an ethnographic framework which takes into account the various factors that are involved in speaking. An ethnography of a communicative event is a description of all the factors that are relevant in understanding how that particular communicative event achieves its objectives. For convenience, Hymes uses the word SPEAKING as an acronym for the various factors he deems to be relevant. We will now consider these factors one by one (Nodoushan, 2006) (Figure 1).

In a sense, cultures are the “residue” of social communication. Without communication and communication media, it would be impossible to preserve and pass along cultural characteristics from one place and time to another. One can say, therefore, that culture is created, shaped, transmitted, and learned through communication. The reverse is also the case; that is; communication practices are largely created, shaped, and transmitted by culture. Lee (2000) mentioned the various social aspects affecting language as well as reinterpretation of the speech community are seen in the research of Gumperz (1972). Here Gumperz mentions that verbal interaction is a social process in which utterances are selected in accordance with socially recognized norms and expectation and that speech is not constrained by grammatical rules alone (1972). In addition, the concept of variation is introduced in Gumperz’s definition of speech community in that the “speech community is a field of action where the distribution of linguistic variants is a reflection of social facts (Gumperz, 1972). According to Shachaf (2008), Culture is a complex, multidimensional construct that can be studied on several levels: international, national, regional, business, and organizational. Each individual is influenced by a wide range of cultural factors: ethnic, organizational, and national. Commonly used definitions of cultural diversity include racial, sexual, organizational, professional, and national heterogeneity. Cultural diversity is here defined as heterogeneity of national cultures of team members; an individual’s national culture is considered to be that of his or her country of residence.

3. Teaching, Learning and Culture Diversity

People use language for purposeful communication and learning a new language involves learning how to use words, rules and knowledge about language and its use in order to communicate with speakers of the language. This understanding of language sees a language not simply as a body of knowledge to be learnt but as a social practice in which to participate (Kramsch, 1994). This context is not a single culture as both the target language and culture and the learner’s own language and culture are simultaneously present and can be simultaneously engaged. Learning to

communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which culture interrelates with language whenever it is used (Kohler, 2003).

According to Gardner (1984), Culture theory developed on the basis of social anthropology, language is often viewed as a complex system that reflects what meanings are attached to behaviors' and how they are expressed. With the development of literary criticism beyond philological inquiry, and the growth of linguistics as a field in its own right, the split between the teaching of language and the teaching of literate culture widened. Language acquisition became the acquisition of skills, of automatic verbal behaviours that were perceived as having no cultural value in themselves, but that could later give access to a national literature with unique cultural value (Kramsch, 1995). Knowledge of cultures is important for facilitating communication with people. Therefore learners of languages need to learn about and understand cultures. Understanding culture as practices with which people engage becomes centrally important. Learning to be intercultural involves much more than just knowing about another culture: it involves learning to understand how one's own culture shapes perceptions of oneself, of the world, and of our relationship with others. Learners need to become familiar with how they can personally engage with linguistic and cultural diversity (Scarino and Liddicoat, 2009).

4. East and West - Diversity

Javidi and Javidi (1994) reported that Americans tend to emphasize self concept in terms of self-awareness, self-image, self-esteem, self-determination, self-reliance, self-actualization, and self-expression. Therefore, Americans tend to be influenced by language uses that are designed to relate to the self. In contrast, in most Eastern cultures, the self is more preoccupied with the maintaining of groups, such as immediate and extended family. Yum (1994) noted a major difference between East Asian and North American perspectives on communication. She noted the East Asian emphasis on social relationships as opposed to the North American emphasis on individualism. This difference alone leads to different orientations towards linguistic and social choices in communication, along with the development of the grammar of self. With emphasis on an individualized grammar of self, priority is given to private interests and independence. With emphasis on social relationships or collectivity, as with the East Asians (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; and Brown, 1994), values and interests of the group are involved more in the formation of the grammar of self and in communicative choices (Fenimore, 1997).

The expression East and West can constitute a problem as a means of introducing a discussion of cultural issues in language and literacy development. It can imply orientalism that there are impossibly different and ineffable cultures in countries defined by reference to and contrast with Western countries, and that these Eastern cultures are inaccessible to others, who are divided by some arbitrary geographical line from them (Winser, 1996). In Western cultures, people are heterogeneous in terms of norms and values, and are classified as individualistic cultures in which people may disagree upon specific norm and values. While in Eastern cultures, they are characterized as homogeneous, collectivistic and are demanded to conform to cultural norms and values and to identify with the groups to which they belong. Therefore, in the course of relationship development, these two cultures with unique characteristics, utilize different types of uncertainty reduction strategies.

The Chinese writing system usually is described as logographic, that is, a system in which each graphic symbol, called a character, represents a concept or a word (Geoffrey, 1994). Each Chinese character or logograph represents one single unit of meaning (morpheme) and one single segment of speech. This description fits classical Chinese better than it does the modern writing system, which might better be described as morph syllabic, because a character generally represents a morpheme and a syllable. The same character system may be used to represent the majority of various dialects of Chinese. English orientates from spelling system, which means all the English words are combined from twenty-six letters, and there is significant connection between a word itself and pronunciation. On the contrary, every character itself in Chinese is created from one method of six categories of Chinese characters and there is little correlation between a word and its pronunciation. Communication ability to share each other's ideas and feelings is the basis of all human contact, while only 7% of words used between people make up communication, 55% of communication is non-verbal, and the remaining 38% of communication comes from tone of voice (Johnson, 2007). The essential way in societies and to maintain one's culture is to communicate. Intercultural contact is not always successful and frequently disturbs many people. Value-judgments in culture and linguistic structures of Chinese and American differ distinctively not only because of geographical distances but also because of ethnical origins.

5. Conclusions

Cultural diversity doesn't just entail differences in dress and language. It also encompasses different ways of thinking, managing, and communicating. Diversity is a concept that counters discrimination and embraces the inclusion of people with various experiences and backgrounds such education, parental status, geographic location,

language, and culture. Diversity is about learning from others, providing support and respect to those with similar and different experiences. That cultural diversity is a very important factor to be considered offers the key to the people. It is also important to clarify that learning about another culture does not necessarily mean that one must internalize the norms of another culture and accept them. It only provides a channel to learn how to manage the cross-cultural conflicts.

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Table 1. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between AEPS® Social-communication Area and BDI-2 Communication Domain

AEPS® Social-Communication	BDI Communication		
	Expressive	Receptive	Communication
Social-Communicative Interaction	.63 ***	.67 ***	.50
Words, Phrase, and Sentences	.64 ***	.72 ***	.58 ***
Social-Communication Area	.68 ***	.76 ***	.60 ***

Note. ***: significant at .001 level (2 tailed)

** : significant at .01 level (2 tailed)

* : significant at .05 level (2 tailed)

Table 2. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between AEPS[®] Cognitive and BDI-2 Cognitive Domain

AEPS [®] Cognitive Area	BDI Cognitive Domain			
	Attention Memory	and Reasoning Academic	and Perception Concepts	and Cognitive DQ
Concept	.39*	.62 ***	.52 **	.47 *
Category	.50 **	.36 *	.37 *	.15
Sequence	.56 **	.64 ***	.49 *	.37 *
Recall	.53 **	.65 ***	.51 **	.55 **
Problem-Solving	.62 ***	.70 ***	.47 *	.45 *
Play	.25	.37 *	.34	.40 *
Premath	.41 *	.49 *	.42 *	.37 *
Phonological Awareness and Emergent Reading	.52 **	.69 ***	.46 *	.53 **
Cognitive Domain	.64 ***	.78 ***	.61 ***	.57 **

Note. ***: significant at .001 level (2 tailed)

**: significant at .01 level (2 tailed)

*: significant at .05 level (2 tailed)