

**LANGUAGE A MEDIUM TO PROMOTE CULTURAL INTEGRATION.****Qusai Khalid Abdalhameed***Research Scholar, Institute of Advanced Studies In English.***Abstract**

*India is a land of varied cultures, languages and people. We get to meet a variety of cultures in one classroom. Language can be a medium in which cultures could mix together. All can live amicably and peacefully if language unites them and combines them together. The important thing about integration is that the individual cultures, and members of cultural communities, are welcomed and accepted for what they are. There is respect for the practices, beliefs and values of that culture.*



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Chomsky's arguments suggest that there is a language faculty in the human brain that enables a human child to learn any language in just about four years

With respect to communication, again two views emerge. One, promoted ardously by philosophers like John Locke and Bertrand Russell, espouse that language is essentially for communicating thoughts. The other view claims that language is part and parcel of thought, i.e. language plays a cognitive function, and is not a mere vehicle of thought. Interestingly, studies on animals demonstrate that animals can think too, and yet they have no language like ours.

**Cultural integration is a form of cultural exchange in which one group assumes the beliefs, practices and rituals of another group without sacrificing the characteristics of its own culture.** While cultural syncretism carries a negative connotation, cultural integration is generally looked upon as positive because nothing is lost. Seen from this light, cultural integration is a healthy intermingling of the beliefs and rituals of two unique cultures.

(<https://www.reference.com/world-view/definition-cultural-integration>)

To integrate things is to put them together to form something new. It also means that the things that you put together keep their individual characteristics or features. When we talk about integrating cultures we usually refer to several cultures coming together to form a new, multicultural society. Each culture keeps its character, features and values.

A recent example in Durham is the practice of scattering the ashes of the deceased in streams and rivers as part of the Hindu religion.

The power of language to reflect culture and influence thinking was first proposed by an American linguist and anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1884–1939), and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941). The **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis** stated that the way we think and view the world is determined by our language (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2002; Crystal, 1987; Hayes, Ornstein, & Gage, 1987). Instances of cultural language differences are evidenced in that some languages have specific words for concepts whereas other languages use several words to represent a specific concept. For example, the Arabic language includes many specific words for designating a certain type of horse or camel (Crystal, 1987).

Cultural differences have also been noted in the ways in which language is used pragmatically. In our American culture, new skills are typically taught and learned through verbal instruction (Slobin, 1979). In some cultures, new skills are learned through nonverbal observation. A distinction has also been made between cultures that encourage independent learning and those that encourage cooperative learning (McLeod, 1994).

## **Language**

### **Definition**

A language can be defined as a system of signs (verbal or otherwise) intended for communication. It is a system since its constituent components relate to each other in an intricate and yet organized fashion. Again, it is intended for communication, for it can be safely assumed that we speak to pass on information to others. But communication is not the only function of language. In fact, language can be used for dreaming, internal monologue, soliloquy, poetry, etc. For the sake of this discussion, we take the position that, essentially, language plays a communicative role.

### **Culture**

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines culture as “customs, civilization and achievements of a particular time or people.” In general terms then, culture defines a people’s way of life. Indeed, it can be considered as the sum total of norms and values espoused and cherished by a particular people. If values are patterns of behaviour, norms are standards of behaviour.

### **Language and culture**

Language encodes the values and norms in a given society. As a culture changes, so does the language. Language teachers must remember that people from different cultures learn things in different ways. One should not only compare, but contrast the cultural differences in language usage. Visualizing and understanding the differences between the two will enable

the student to correctly judge the appropriate uses and causation of language idiosyncrasies. Clearly, mutation in people's thinking, whether influenced by the new religion or by modern thinking, can render obsolete a cultural practice or value. Once rendered obsolete, language seals off the issue by dropping some terms related to the value.

### **Language change**

Technically speaking, a language is made up of several parts of speech. These include grammatical words such as prepositions, articles, tenses, moods, plurals, etc; and lexical words entailing nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. The latter category is also termed by pragmatists as constituting conceptual terms, i.e. they designate or denote objects in the world. Upon hearing a lexical item, one can associate it with a concept. Conversely, the former category of words does not create concepts, but rather indicate how we should relate the concepts between them. In other words, they give us instructions on how to manipulate concepts. Language change primarily concerns conceptual terms.

As we learn new ideas or concepts, we require a word to describe them. We rarely meet new grammatical words, so change here is minimal, if any. Some illustrations are in order at this juncture.

These illustrations underline the idea that conceptual words keep growing and expanding as we live out our lives. These terms have the knack of creating mental representations of concepts in us.

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From birth, the child's life, opinions, and language are shaped by what it comes in contact with. Brooks (1968) argues that physically and mentally everyone is the same, while the interactions between persons or groups vary widely from place to place. Patterns which emerge from these group behaviours and interactions will be approved of, or disapproved of. Behaviours which are acceptable will vary from location to location (Brooks, 1968) thus forming the basis of different cultures. It is from these differences that one's view of the world is formed. Hantrais (1989) puts forth the idea that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Therefore, everyone's views are dependent on the culture which has influenced them, as well

as being described using the language which has been shaped by that culture. The understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. This brings us to an interesting point brought up by Emmitt and Pollock (1997), who argue that even though people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different. As Sapir-Whorf argues, different thoughts are brought about by the use of different forms of language. One is limited by the language used to express one's ideas. Different languages will create different limitations, therefore a people who share a culture but speak different languages, will have different world views. Still, language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock 1997).

From this, one can see that learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture (Allwright & Bailey 1991). Consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989).

The implications of language being completely entwined in culture, in regards for language teaching and language policy are far reaching. Language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions or prejudices. Language policy must be used to create awareness and understandings of cultural differences, and written to incorporate the cultural values of those being taught.

### **Implications for language teaching**

Teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage. If one teaches language without teaching about the culture in which it operates, the students are learning empty or meaningless symbols or they may attach the incorrect meaning to what is being taught. The students, when using the learnt language, may use the language inappropriately or within the wrong cultural context, thus defeating the purpose of learning a language.

Conflict in teaching styles also stem from the relationship between language and culture. Because language is so closely entwined with culture, language teachers entering a different culture must respect their cultural values. As Englebert (2004) describes: "...to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture, and it is important to be sensitive to the fact that our students, our colleges, our administrators, and, if we live abroad, our neighbours, do not share all of our cultural paradigms."

## **Conclusion**

Language and culture are intertwined like the two-sides of the same sheet of paper. They breathe, blossom, shrivel up and die due to many reasons. Both of them are sensitive and adapt to prevailing circumstances. Language gives full expression to people's values and norms, and since values and norms are dynamic by nature, language has to be in tandem with cultural transformations. Technological, political, economic and social innovations require language to enrich its lexicon to capture the new realities. Indeed, our minds create mental representations of values thanks to language. The collapse of a value system may sound the death knell to the language in question. The death of a culture will almost certainly be followed by the demise of the language associated with that culture.

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