



## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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### Abstract

The article is dedicated to exploring the relationship between language and culture, their mutual influence, and their role in shaping societal identity. It examines the theoretical foundations of the concept of language as a carrier of cultural values, as well as the practical aspects of the interaction between language and culture in the process of communication and societal development. Special attention is given to how linguistic features reflect cultural characteristics and how, in turn, culture influences the development of language.

**Keywords:** Concept, culture, language, linguoculturology, society, interaction, subculture

### Introduction

Nowadays, the issue of human communication is one of the most important subjects occupying the minds of linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers. Since it is the most important means of communication among human beings, the relation between language, culture, and their mutual interactions have high significance. The relevance of the problem “language and culture” was initially put forth by V. Humboldt, who claims that language expresses “the objective reality of the nation” and “cultural spirit” (Гумбольдт, 1985: 370-377). He outlined the following basic concepts: 1) the material and spiritual cultures are embodied in language; 2) any culture has its national character presented in language; 3) language of one specific culture is an expression of “national spirit”; 4) the subject of “language and culture” is studied an individual or community.

Another scholar Levi-Strauss determines the language as “the product of the culture and its constituents” (Маслова, 2001: 26). American anthropologist and linguist E. Sapir states that the language is tightly coupled with culture and that language is “germinated” from culture and further reflects it (Сепир, 1993: 223). Thus, according to the statements given, it follows that the language is the main means to store, transfer and reflect culture. This postulate has become a substantial one to a new





interdisciplinary science: linguistics and culturology in the last decades of the XX century.

Generally speaking, language is introduced by Crystal (1971, 1992) as “the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression”. Similarly, Emmitt and Pollock (1997) believe that language is a system of arbitrary signs which is accepted by a group and society of users. Chase (1969) declares that the purpose of language use is to communicate with others, to think, and to shape one’s standpoint and outlook of life.

Today, in every field, in humanities, every research requires a general view of culture. It is used in archaeology, linguistics, history, psychology, sociology and etc. It is even said that man is an animal with culture. That is to say, the factor which differentiates the human being's behavior from the behavior of animal is culture (Mesbahe Yazdi, 2005). In general, from the sociological perspective, culture is the total of the inherited and innate ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, and knowledge, comprising or forming the shared foundations of social action. Likewise, from the anthropological and ethnological senses, culture encompasses the total range of activities and ideas of a specific group of people with common and shared traditions, which are conveyed, distributed, and highlighted by members of the group (Collins English Dictionary 2003).

There are about two or three hundred and even more definitions of culture. With respect to the definition of culture, Edward Sapir (1956) says that culture is a system of behaviour and modes that depend on the unconsciousness. Rocher (1972, 2004), an anthropologist, believes that “Culture is a connection of ideas and feelings accepted by the majority of people in a society” (p. 142). Undeniably, culture is learned and shared within social groups and is conveyed by nongenetic ways. Goodenough (1996) claims that culture is a systematic association of people that have a certain way of life. Therefore, culture is the only distinction between human and animals, culture is for men, only. T. S. Eliot (1961) considers culture as a capital means for developing the process of a society, for helping economic stabilization and political security. Spencer (1986) believes that the super organic factor is only for man, whereas; the other two factors are the same for a man and animal.

In view of anthropology the word culture is to be interpreted, not in its classical sense, but in what might be described loosely as its anthropological sense. In fact, this is the sense in which Herder proposed that the term should be used; but it was not until about eighty years later that anthropologist writing in English adopted this usage. In this second sense, culture is employed without any implication of unilinear human progress from barbarism to civilization and without a prior value being made as to the





aesthetic or intellectual quality of a particular society's art, literature, institutions and so on. In this sense of the term, which has spread from anthropology to the other social sciences, every society has its own culture; and different subgroups within a society may have their own distinctive subculture. Herder's promotion of the word culture in this sense was bound up with this thesis of the interdependence of language and thought, on the one hand, and, on the other, with his view that a nation's language and culture were manifestations of its distinctive national spirit or mind. Indeed, many other writers in the Romantic movement had similar ideas. This is one strand in the complex historical development of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which dominated all discussion of language and culture.

Although the word culture is now widely employed in the social sciences, and especially by anthropologists, in the sense that has just been identified, it can be defined, technically, in several different ways. Culture may be described as socially acquired knowledge, to be precise, as the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his being a member of a particular society. Two points must be made here about the use of the word knowledge. First, it is to be understood as covering practical knowledge: both knowing how to do something and knowing that something is or is not so. Second, as far as propositional knowledge is concerned, it is the fact that something is held to be true that counts, not its actual truth or falsity. Furthermore, in relation to most, if not all, cultures we must allow for different kinds or levels of truth, such that for example the truth of a religious or mythological statement is evaluated differently from that of a straightforward factual report. Looking from this point of view, science itself is a part of culture. And in the discussion of the relationship between language and culture no priority should be given to scientific knowledge over common-sense knowledge or even superstition.

Although many researchers believe in a relationships between language and culture, there are a few who remain unconvinced of this. Boas, for example, was a staunch believer in no connection between the two. Comrie found no grounds for it either, while Pinker had "...no patience at all for any of Whorf's ideas." (Wardhaugh, 2002, p 225).

Other researchers, however, did find evidence of some influence of one on the other. Lucy was one of these researchers. In his study of pluralization of nouns between English and Yucatec Maya, he discovered that the latter did not have plurals for inanimate objects. This made a difference in how the Yucatec Maya viewed the world. For example, Lucy's research showed they were not conscious of as many countable nouns as the English speakers were (Wardhaugh, 2002). Whorf, himself, did research on the matter and found in his studies with the Hopi of America that their world view





was quite different from that of a Standard Average European (SAE). The Hopi looked at the concept of time as a process while the Europeans viewed it as a definite fixed state (Wardhaugh, 2002).

Brown is convinced there is a connection between language and culture. He says, “It is apparent that culture... becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is part of a culture, and a culture is part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven... (Bown, 2000, p. 177). Research done by Robinson-Stuart and Nocon in 1996 as well as Scollon and Scollon in 1995 confirm this belief (as cited in Brown, 2002).

Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. Language, the most commonplace of all human possessions, is possibly the most complex and the most interesting.

The people express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. In other words, language expresses cultural reality.

Indeed, there are various ways in which people use the spoken, written, the speaker’s tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expression. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality. That is, culture has a direct effect on language. Language and culture are closely correlated.

Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language, they view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. So, we can say that language symbolizes cultural reality (Claire Kramersch, “Language and Culture”).

Human being is a social creature. In fact, man is a receiver and sender of messages who assembles and distributes information (Greimas, 1970). Sapir insists that “every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication in either an explicit or implicit sense” (Sapir, 1956, p. 104). The tool for this communication is language.

Concerning the above discussion we can say that language is an inevitable part of culture because: 1) it is a part of culture that we inherit from our ancestors; 2) language is the dominant tool with the help of which we learn culture; 3) language is a significant phenomenon – to understand the essence of culture (religion, literature, science) one should consider these phenomena as codes generated within language.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can stress that languages reflect culture. It is often said that language is a “mirror” of a particular community because language reflects its spiritual and material cultures. Thus, it can be claimed that there are close relations between language and culture. In the context of globalization, the importance of preserving linguistic and cultural diversity becomes particularly relevant, as it helps strengthen intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Thus, studying the interaction between language and culture helps to better understand the essence of human society and promotes the development of intercultural competence in the modern world.

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