

The study and teaching of a language cannot be divorced from its social context.

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Abstract:- The aim of this study is to briefly discuss the relationship between language and culture and provide some examples of this relation from the perspectives of studying and teaching a language. It is important to understand the relationship between language and culture and to know which is controlling which. This paper somehow leaned towards the positive aspects of this relation and focused on educational systems that are flexible regarding cultural concepts when studying/teaching a language.

Key words : *Language teaching/learning, language and culture, code-switching, Language identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is an abstract term which generally means “the method of human communication either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way” (Oxford dictionary of English, 2005). Language is a means of communication between people of the same geographical place without the regard of language globalization and language boundaries. People of the same geographical places (countries) usually have one language considered as their mother tongue and also they have the concept of culture. Culture is also an abstract concept as many definitions in the literature but in general, it is the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively (Oxford dictionary of English, 2005). From this definition, one may tell that there is an implication of communication within this definition and although one may think that without language (communication) cultural aspects and concepts would not be existed, while others think that it is culture that creates language. Since there is an overlapping between language and culture and each group of people of the same geographical place has their language and culture, there is a relationship between the set of (Holmes, J. 2013). It is important to understand the relationship between language and culture and to know which is controlling which. This essay will briefly discuss the relationship between language and culture and provide some examples of this relation from the perspectives of studying and teaching a language.

II. LANGUAGE STUDY

varieties and styles:

As mentioned previously that each group of people according to their geographical place has their language and culture, it is known that people of the same country may have, as linguists called, ‘language varieties’ and these varieties of the same language is due to cultural differences (Holmes, J. 2013). Sociolinguists and anthropologists indicated that the style of communication of a language (dialects, jargons) of a group of people is comprehended in a specific culture (Romaine, S. 2000). So, the shared language those group uses is somehow showing their identity i.e. because their culture played roles in changing the general language and make it as a dialect for them, this dialect is part of their cultural identity. Sapir, E and Whorf, B. L. (1956) established the hypothesis that “the fact of the matter is that ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habit of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation”. The famous example of their hypothesis is the use of the word “snow” in the context of Eskimo and English languages. Therefore, language is used as a social tool and also shapes how people see the world and that is an example of the relationship between language and culture.

Code-Switching:

Code-Switching is the turning between two languages or may be more than two, in the case of multilingual or switching between the varieties of the same language, in the case of monolinguals and that is happened in the same context. So, it is the usage of a number of linguistic varieties syntactically and phonologically in one context (Romaine, S. 2000). People tend to use the code switching for functional purposes as Milroy, L. (1987) argued the identification of ‘prestige forms’ has been considered in the work of sociolinguists. The use of prestigious forms is somehow a reflection not for the language as a grammar purposes but for the cultural purposes and a proper example to that is Javanese language. Hudson, R. A. (1980), Trudgill, P. (1983), Coulthard, M. (1985nd ed.), and Holmes, J. (1992) seem to be interested in this language, because it has a hierarchical system varieties and large number of lexical differences. So, for Javanese people, the language is different whether

their addressee is of a higher or lower status compared with them. It is a changing of the language according to the person that one is talking to; this is the 'Interpersonal' concept of Halliday that each particular social context tends to have its own 'Genre' and people may switch their interactional discourse to fit a specific genre. The hierarchy and ranking system is one of the concepts of culture, so this is another example of the intervening of culture in language.

Case Study:

Another example of the relationship between language and culture is in the case study by Lupyan, G. and Dale, R. (2010) They have analysed statistically a large number of languages by using a number of 'demographic sources' and the World Atlas of Language Structures'. It has been found that there is a significant link between the difficulty of a language (morphologically) and the speakers' number of this language; demographically/sociohistorically, the complexity of a language depends most on geographical ubiquity of this language and its usage (ibid, 2010). They found that if a language is spoken by a large number of people and (is) widely spread, then this language is less complex morphologically, due to the adaptation 'social environments' i.e. because it is widely spread people are more likely to simplify their language structures in order to involve a diverse range of speakers from different ethnic groups and different 'linguistic backgrounds' (ibid, 2010). The link between social context and language change is somewhat obvious. Languages are more likely to be less complex than before, because of the societal power of people to change and also cultural aspects might be subject to change through time, so the relationship between societal power of change and the actual change in language seems to be dynamic (Lupyan, G. and Dale, R. 2010). Nettle, D. (1998) and Hay, J. & Bauer, L. (2007) (cited in Lupyan, G. and Dale, R. 2010) also argued that there is a relationship between the structure of a language and its social environment, and also have found that not only the social environment has relations to the language structure, but to the 'physical aspects of the environment' too. This relationship between physical aspects of the environment and language structure has also been argued by Muntoro, I. et al. (2009) (cited in Lupyan, G. and Dale, R. 2010). In addition, mentioning again Sapir's example of the word 'snow'; its differences between English and Eskimo languages is probably a physical aspect of the environment, maybe because the Eskimo's exposure to snow is different from English' and that's what changed the meaning. However, social environment is more prominent in the literature. Lupyan, G. and Dale, R. (2010) has divided languages into two principles according to their use and speakers' number: 'exoteric' which are the languages that are widely spread and spoken by a large number of people from different backgrounds, for instance: English and 'esoteric' which are the languages that are not spread and spoken by small numbers of people, for instance: Tatar. Therefore, the social environment has more effect on the exoteric languages than it does to: firstly, the spread of these languages which might be difficult to stay as it is in different geographical places and secondly, because of the large number of speakers, especially non-natives, the force toward change may be stronger, and the change tends to be always towards the simpler not the complex.

III. LANGUAGE TEACHING

In the study of 'communicative language teaching' this is the teaching of a language through the focus on communication (interaction), Woods, D. and Cakir, H. (2011) argue that there are two 'dimensions' regarding the teachers' knowledge: The first dimension is 'personal/impersonal' and the second one is 'theoretical/practical' which means that there is a relationship between the teachers' knowledge and beliefs. Therefore, teachers may find themselves in the position of reflecting their 'culture' while teaching as long as considering beliefs as a significant part of culture. These two teachers' dimensions are somehow interrelated; teachers' obtained knowledge and thinking which is the impersonal side are applied to their theoretical 'explicit' knowledge and what they are actually doing (implicitly) in practice (ibid, 2011). As there is an overlapping in the personal/impersonal dimension teachers seem to use their beliefs theoretically and practically i.e. their 'objectivity' seems to be affected by their 'subjectivity' (ibid, 2011). It is not definite that teachers use their cultural beliefs while teaching. However, in literature, it has been found that teachers reflect their cultural views in their context. Personally, I think it depends on the cultural context that teachers use. Although sometimes there are teachers' students' beliefs differences communicative language teaching tends to make these differences beneficial in a way to know how people from mother cultures think and as an approach, it is an important example to relate language teaching to culture. Another example from the teachers' perspectives while teaching a language is the research conducted by Blanchet, Cohen, N. and Reilly, R. (2013) in Quebec which is a multicultural urban locale. It has a large number of students from different backgrounds, which makes it difficult in the education system. Blanchet, Cohen, N. and Reilly, R. (2013) highlighted the 'environmental education' to solve the problem of this locale; the problem is with the cultural significant diversity encountered by the educational system. "Research internationally shows that education systems that embrace linguistic diversity are most beneficial to student learning, fostering academic achievement, self-esteem and confidence" (Cummins, 2007; Falbo & de Baessa, 2006; Kymlicka, 2003) (cited in Blanchet, Cohen, N. and Reilly, R. 2013) However, the claim of Quebec educational system to pursue unified values that embrace the French language and culture; and that what put pressure on both students and teachers (Blanchet, Cohen, N. and Reilly, R. 2013). Ibid (2013) offered environmental education as a solution to these pressures because it contains variable methods of teaching that somehow separate the dominance of one cultural concept from the educational system. Although this system of education has a number of limitations, it is a positive system that provides significant opportunities not only in teaching a language but also in teaching in general.

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this essay highlighted the issue that there is a relationship between language and culture, and showed briefly some examples of this relation from the perspectives of studying and teaching a language. This relation seems to be obvious; the controversial issue is whether this relation could affect positively on studying/teaching a language or not. This paper is somehow leaning towards the positive side of this relation and focused on educational systems that tended to be flexible regarding cultural concepts or may be do not have cultural dominance when studying/teaching a language. Finally, the separation of language and culture is slightly difficult, because it is suggested that culture is part of the identity of the language.

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