

ON THE LANGUAGE – CULTURE CORRELATION

Culture is not infrequently defined as an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit them to the coming generations. This means that language is not only part of how we define culture, it also reflects culture. Thus, culture associated with language cannot be learned within a few lessons about celebrations, folk songs, or costumes of the area in which the language is spoken. Culture is a much broader concept that is inherently tied to many linguistic concepts.

Linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. Language learners need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. They should know that behaviors and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own speech community may be perceived differently by members of the target language speech community. They have to understand that in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with culturally appropriate behavior.

Cultures are not monolithic. A variety of successful behaviors are possible for any type of interaction in any particular culture.

Intercultural communication has acquired paramount importance in modern linguistics. It should be noted that the term (intercultural communication), which was practically unknown in Armenia some fifteen years ago, has become extremely popular nowadays. The language barrier is known from the time of the Tower of Babel. The cultural barrier is unseen until a clash between your own indigenous culture and an alien one takes place. At best these clashes are surprising, but usually they are simply off-putting or shocking. Thus the culture barrier is far more dangerous than the language barrier. It is made, as it were, of absolutely transparent glass and is imperceptible until one ends up with a black eye, having bumped into it. It is dangerous too in the sense that cultural mistakes are usually taken much more to hurt than are language mistakes, and this occurs despite the fact that the former are far more excusable; there are more general rules – no grammars of culture – to help one avoid cultural mistakes as there are in the case of languages. We all know from our

own experience that native speakers are usually very good-natured about the mistakes we make when speaking their language. But cultural mistakes, as a rule, are not forgiven so easily and leave a very negative impression.

It is necessary to state the interrelation between language and culture. They are inseparable. Language is part of culture and culture is part of language. What are the main linguistic difficulties hampering international and intercultural communication?

The interrelation of language and culture is traditionally expressed through widely used metaphors; language is a mirror of culture, it reflects the world around us and the world inside us. Moreover, it also reflects peoples' collective self-consciousness, their mentality, national character, way of life, customs and traditions, moral standards, and values, and world outlook.

A language is a treasure-house, repository of culture. Culture values are stored in all its forms – lexis, grammar, idioms, proverbs, sayings, folklore, fiction and non-fiction, oral and written discourse.

Language is a transmitter, a carrier of culture; it passes on the treasures of national culture preserved in it from generation to generation. In mastering their native language, children also assimilate the generalized culture experience of the preceding generation.

Language is an instrument of culture. It forms the identity of a native speaker by forcing upon him or her world view, mentality attitude to people, etc. inherent in it, i.e. the culture of people who use this language to communicate with one another.

As a mirror, language reflects not culture merely but the whole world surrounding us. It creates, as we all know very well, the linguistic picture of the world. This picture is nation-specific and is imposed on native speakers of the language. Developing this metaphor with a picture, we may assume that language can be presented as a mosaic which is made of pieces - words and other language units functionally equivalent to word.

Thus, learning a language in general and a foreign language in particular, begins with learning a word - first the sound [oral form] or the look of it [written form] and then the meaning. The forms of words of different languages are obviously different but their meanings must be the same. (Ter-Minasova, 2005: 80)

Proverbs and popular sayings are capsules that contain highly condensed bits of a culture's values and beliefs. They are passed on from generation to generation as a legacy of folk wisdom. People tend to accept them in an uncritical way, as 'truths' learned by the elders. They have great influence on the assumptions, attitudes, motivations and behaviors of the members of a culture precisely because they are absorbed and internalized at a very early age and then are taken for granted. An excellent way to gain insight into a culture is to analyze its unique sayings and proverbs. For example, traditional values

regarding male/female roles, money and wealth, and openness to change, all have their corresponding sayings. An additional benefit of seeking the folk wisdom of another country is that it shows interest in what is important to the local people. The elders, in particular, are great sources of traditional proverbs.

Many of the proverbs have Latin origin. For instance, the English proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" has its roots in the Latin phrase "Ad presens ova cras pullis sunt meliora" or "Still waters run deep" - in the Latin "Altissima quaeque lumina minimo sono labi".

Apart from these, nations are united by the power of biblical wisdom. For example, the English proverb "A leopard cannot change its spots" extracts its meaning from the Bible (the Book of Jeremiah), which sometimes developed into distinct proverbs: or "Running from Charybdis, he rushed upon Scylla" which contains The Greek mythological figures (the two monsters who were said to be threatening passing ships). On the other hand, our common oral heritage has been continuously reshaped since its components are very dynamic in the way they are transmitted, but the core of the meanings remains the same. This is what happens with some of the proverbs nowadays. There is a common meaning hidden in each proverb, but the way it is worded differs from nationality to nationality in the way that they want to make it unique and self preserving.

Different versions of the same proverb or saying were mostly influenced by geographical symbols, or social or cultural background. The English saying "to carry coals to Newcastle" carries no meaning for a Hungarian, because Newcastle is not a representative landmark for Hungary. Instead, a Hungarian would rather say: "to take water into Danube", because the river is an important geographical symbol for his country. In the same way, if English people say "to take French leave", the Romanians or Polish say "to take English leave" because they associate the English people rather than the French ones with this sort of behavior.

It should be added that the perception of the traditions rooted in another culture makes us aware of our own self, highlights the uniqueness of our own national heritage because making evident who we are, involves more than just language or nationality, it also involves culture, folklore and many other things.

As far as the didactic aspect of culture is concerned, we should hasten to mention, that in many regards culture is taught implicitly, embedded in the linguistic forms that students are learning. To make students aware of the cultural features reflected in the language, teachers can make those cultural features an explicit topic for discussion in relation to the linguistic forms studied. For example, when teaching subject pronouns and verbal inflections in French, a teacher could help students understand that in French it is appropriate to use an informal form of address (tu) rather than a formal one (vous), whereas this distinction does not exist in English. An English as a second language teacher could help students understand socially appropriate communication, such as

making requests that show respect. For example, "Hey, you, come here" may be a linguistically correct request but it is not a culturally appropriate way for a student to address a teacher. Students will master a language only when they learn both its linguistic and cultural norms.

Our observations in the sphere of proverbs in English bring us to the firm belief that they depict the experience, culture and the way of life of the speakers and it is natural that languages spoken in an area will have proverbs which are thematically common. Since the geography of a land has an impact on the history of the people occupying it, both geographical and historical facts affect the way of life of the people and their languages. Accordingly, proverbs will also reflect the differences in expression while sharing a common theme. Proverbs in different languages of a country will indicate the commonness in the perception of life of its people and will preserve the unique culture and social features of each of the speech communities. Thus, the understanding of common proverbs in different languages will enable us to understand each other better.

Bibliography

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