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INTRODUCTION

The intersection of culture and affect is another affective aspect of the communicative process.

- How do learners overcome the personal and transactional barriers presented by two cultures in contact?

- What is the relationship of culture learning to second language learning

Culture is a way of life.

It is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others.

It is the "glue" that binds a group of people together.

Culture can be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time.

The fact that no society exists without a culture reflects the need for culture to fulfill certain biological and psychological needs in human beings.

Culture establishes for each person a context of cognitive and affective behavior, a template for personal and social existence.

Humans tend to perceive reality within the context of their own culture, a reality that they have "created," and therefore not necessarily a reality that is empirically defined.

Although the opportunities for world travel in the last several decades have increased markedly, there is still a tendency for us to believe that our own reality is the "correct" perception.

Perception is always subjective.

Perception involves the filtering of information even before it is stored in memory, resulting in a selective form of consciousness.

What appears to you to be an accurate and objective perception of an individual, a custom, an idea, might be "jaded" or "stilted" in the view of someone from another culture.

Misunderstandings are therefore likely to occur between members of different cultures.

People from other cultures may appear, in your eyes, to be "loud" or "quiet," "conservative" or "liberal" in reference to your own point of view.

Culture and SLA:

Culture becomes highly important in the learning of a second language.

A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

The acquisition of a second language is also the acquisition of a second culture.

Both linguists and anthropologists agree on this.

This chapter attempts to highlight some of the important aspects of the relationship between learning a second language and learning the cultural context of the second language.

The topics to be covered in this chapter are:

- Cultural stereotypes

- Attitudes

- Learning a second culture

- Sociopolitical considerations

- The relationship among language, thought, and culture

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CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Mark Twain: Example

gave an interesting biased view of other cultures and other languages in *A Tramp Abroad.*

Twain noted that German is a most difficult language: "A gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in 30 hours, French in 30 days, and German in 30 years."

So, he proposed to reform the German language, for "if it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it."

Twain, like all of us at times, expressed caricatures of linguistic and cultural stereotypes.

In the bias of our own culture-bound world view, we too often picture other cultures in an oversimplified manner, lumping cultural differences into exaggerated categories, and then view every person in a culture as possessing stereotypical traits.

- Americans are all rich, informal, materialistic, overly friendly, and drink coffee.

- Italians are passionate, demonstrative, and drink red wine.

- Germans are stubborn, industrious, methodical, and drink beer.

- The British are stuffy, polite, thrifty, and drink tea.

- The Japanese are reserved, unemotional, take a lot of pictures, and also drink tea.

Francois Lierres: Example

Francois Lierres, writing in the Paris newsmagazine *Le Point,* gave some tongue-in-cheek advice to French people on how to get along with Americans.

He offered some *do's* and *don'ts.*

The do's:

- Greet them, but after you have been introduced once, don't shake hands, merely emit a brief cluck of joy—"Hi."

- Speak without emotion and with self-assurance, giving the impression you have a command of the subject even if you haven't.

- Check the collar of your jacket—nothing is uglier in the eyes of an American than dandruff.

- Radiate friendliness and show a good disposition—a big smile and a warm expression are essential.

- Learn how to play golf.

The don'ts:

- Don't tamper with your accent—Americans find French accents very romantic.

- Don't allow the slightest smell of perspiration to reach the offended nostrils of your American friends.

How do stereotypes form?

Our cultural milieu (background) shapes our world view in such a way that reality is thought to be objectively perceived through our own cultural pattern, and a differing perception is seen as either false or "strange" and is thus oversimplified.

Open-minded view

If people recognize and understand differing world views, they will usually adopt a positive and open-minded attitude toward cross-cultural differences.

Closed-minded view

A closed-minded view of such differences often results in the maintenance of a stereotype—an oversimplification and blanket assumption.

A stereotype assigns group characteristics to individuals purely on the basis of their cultural membership.

The stereotype may be accurate in depicting the "typical" member of a culture, but it is inaccurate for describing a particular individual, simply because every person is unique.

To judge a single member of a culture by overall traits of the culture is both to prejudge and to misjudge that person.

Sometimes our oversimplified concepts of members of another culture are downright false.

EXAMPLES:

- Americans sometimes think of Japanese as being unfriendly because of their cultural norms of respect and politeness.

- The false view that members of another culture are "dirty" or "smelly"— with verbal and nonverbal messages conveying that view—in fact usually stems from different customs of bathing or olfactory norms. Muriel Saville-Troike noted that:

- Middle-class whites may objectively note that the lower socio-economic classes frequently lack proper bathing facilities or changes of clothing, but may be surprised to discover that a common stereotype blacks hold of whites is that they "smell like dogs coming in out of the rain." Asians have a similar stereotype of Caucasians.

While stereotyping, or overgeneralizing, people from other cultures should be avoided, cross-cultural research has shown that there are indeed characteristics of culture that make one culture different from another.

Condon (1973) concluded from cross-cultural research that American, French, and Hispanic world views are quite different in their concepts of time and space.

Both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, to recognize openly that people are not all the same beneath the skin.

There are real differences between groups and cultures.

We can learn to perceive those differences, appreciate them, and above all to respect and value the personhood of every human being.

Stereotyping usually implies some type of **attitude** toward the culture or language in question.

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ATTITUDES

Stereotyping usually implies some type of attitude toward the culture or language in question.

The following passage, an excerpt from an item on "Chinese literature "in the *New Standard Encyclopedia* published in 1940, is an incredible example of a negative attitude stemming from a stereotype:

> The Chinese Language is monosyllabic and uninflectional... .With a language so incapable of variation, a literature cannot be produced which possesses the qualities we look for and admire in literary works. Elegance, variety, beauty of imagery—these must all be lacking. ...Moreover, a conservative people . . . profoundly reverencing all that is old and formal, and hating innovation, must leave the impress of its own character upon its literature. (Volume VI)

Fortunately such views would probably not be expressed in encyclopedias today.

Such biased attitudes are based on insufficient knowledge, misinformed stereotyping, and extreme ethnocentric thinking.

Attitudes develop early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, of contact "with people who are "different" in any number of ways, and of interacting affective factors in the human experience.

These attitudes form a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one is living.

Gardner and Lambert's (1972)

Gardner and Lambert's (1972) extensive studies were systematic attempts to examine the effect of attitudes on language learning.

After studying the interrelationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined motivation as a construct made up of certain attitudes.

The most important of these is group-specific, the attitude learners have toward the members of the cultural group whose language they are learning.

Thus, in Gardner and Lambert's model, an English-speaking Canadian's positive attitude toward French-Canadians—a desire to understand them and to empathize with them—will lead to an integrative orientation to learn French, Which in their 1972 study was found to be a significant correlate of success.

John Oiler et al

John Oiler and his colleagues conducted three large-scale studies of the relationship between attitudes and language success.

They looked at the relationship between Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican students' achievement in English and their attitudes toward:

- Self

- The native language group

- The target language group

- Their reasons for learning English

- Their reasons for traveling to the United States

The researchers were able to identify a few meaningful clusters of attitudinal variables that correlated positively with attained proficiency.

Each of the three studies yielded slightly different conclusions, but for the most part, positive attitudes toward self, the native language group, and the target language group enhanced proficiency.

There were mixed results on the relative advantages and disadvantages of integrative and instrumental orientations.

For example, in one study they found that better proficiency was attained by students who did not want to stay in the United States permanently.

It seems clear that second language learners benefit from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and, in all likelihood, because of decreased input and interaction, to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency.

Teachers need to be aware that everyone has both *positive* and *negative* attitudes.

- Negative attitudes usually emerge from one's indirect exposure to a culture or group through television, movies, news media, books, and other sources that may be less than reliable.

- Teachers can aid in dispelling what are often myths about other cultures, and replace those myths with an accurate understanding of the other culture as one that is different from one's own, yet to be respected and valued.

Learners can thus move through the hierarchy of affectivity: through awareness and responding, to valuing, and finally to an organized and systematic understanding and appreciation of the foreign culture.

The process of *acculturation* runs even deeper when language is brought into the picture.

Culture is a deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language (the means for communication among members of a culture) is the most visible and available expression of that culture.

A person's world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a contact with another culture.

Sometimes that disruption is severe, in which case a person may experience **culture shock.**

**Culture shock** refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis.

Culture shock is associated with feelings of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness.

Persons undergoing culture shock view their new world out of resentment and alternate between self-pity and anger at others for not understanding them.

Example:

Edward Hall (1959: 59) described a hypothetical example of an American living abroad (in Japan) for the first time:

> At first, things in the cities look pretty much alike. There are taxis, hotels with hot and cold running water, theaters, neon lights, even tall buildings with elevators and a few people who can speak English. But pretty soon the American discovers that underneath the familiar exterior there are vast differences. When someone says "yes" it often doesn't mean yes at all, and when people smile it doesn't always mean they are pleased. When the American visitor makes a helpful gesture he may be rebuffed; when he tries to be friendly nothing happens. People tell him that they will do things and don't. The longer he stays, the more enigmatic the new country looks.

This case of an American in Japan illustrates the point that persons in a second culture may initially be comfortable and delighted with the "exotic" surroundings.

As long as they can perceptually filter their surroundings and internalize the environment in their *own* world view, they feel at ease.

As soon as this newness wears off and the cognitive and affective contradictions of the foreign culture mount up, they become disoriented.

It is common to describe culture shock as the second of <u>four successive stages</u> of **culture acquisition**:

<u>Stage 1</u>

is a period of excitement and euphoria (an extremely strong feeling of happiness and excitement which usually only lasts for a short time) over the newness of the surroundings.

<u>Stage 2</u>

Culture shock emerges as individuals feel the intrusion of more and more cultural differences into their own images of self and security.

In this stage individuals rely on and seek out the support of their fellow countrymen in the second culture, taking solace in complaining about local customs and conditions, seeking escape from their predicament.

<u>Stage 3</u>

is one of gradual, and at first tentative and vacillating, recovery.

This stage is typified by what Larson and Smalley (1972) called "culture stress": some problems of acculturation are solved while other problems continue for some time. But general progress is made, slowly but surely, as individuals begin to accept the differences in thinking and feeling that surround them, slowly becoming more empathic with other persons in the second culture.

<u>Stage 4</u>

represents near or full recovery, either assimilation or adaptation, acceptance of the new culture and self-confidence in the "new" person that has developed in this culture.

Wallace Lambert's (1967) work on attitudes in second language learning referred often to Durkheim's (1897) concept *of anomie*—feelings of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction—as a significant aspect of the relationship between language learning and attitude toward the foreign culture.

As individuals begin to lose some of the ties of their native culture and to adapt to the second culture, they experience feelings of chagrin or regret, mixed with the fearful anticipation of entering a new group.

Anomie might be described as the first symptom of the third stage of acculturation, a feeling of homelessness, where one feels neither bound firmly to one's native culture nor fully adapted to the second culture.

Lambert's research supported the view that the strongest dose of anomie is experienced when linguistically a person begins to "master" the foreign language.

In Lambert's (1967) study, for example, when English-speaking Canadians became so skilled in French that they began to "think" in French and even dream in French, feelings of anomie were markedly high.

For Lambert's subjects the interaction of anomie and increased skill in the language sometimes led persons to revert or to "regress" back to English—to seek out situations in which they could speak English.

Such an urge corresponds to the tentativeness of the third stage of acculturation— periodic reversion to the escape mechanisms acquired in the earlier stage of culture shock.

Not until a person is well into the third stage do feelings of anomie decrease because the learner is "over the hump "in the transition to adaptation.

The culture shock stage of acculturation need not be depicted as a point when learners are unwitting and helpless victims of circumstance.

Peter Adler (1972: 14) noted that culture shock, while surely possessing manifestations of crisis, can also be viewed more positively as:

> a profound cross-cultural learning experience, a set of situations or circumstances involving intercultural communication in which the individual, as a result of the experiences, becomes aware of his own growth, learning and change.

As a result of the culture shock process, the individual has gained a new perspective on himself, and has come to understand his own identity in terms significant to himself.

The cross-cultural learning experience, additionally, takes place when the individual encounters a different culture and as a result:

(a) examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture

(b) understands the culturally derived values, attitudes and outlooks of other people

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SOCIAL DISTANCE

What is social distance?

It is the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures that come into contact within an individual (in a metaphorical sense it refers to the dissimilarity between two cultures).

John Schumann described social distance as consisting of the following parameters:

1. *Dominance.*

In relation to the TL [target language] group, is the L2 group politically, culturally, technically or economically dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate?

2. *Integration.*

Is the integration pattern of the L2 group assimilation, acculturation, or preservation?

3. *Cohesiveness.*

Is the L2 group cohesive? What is the size of the L2 group?

4. *Congruence.*

Are the cultures of the two groups congruent—similar in their value and belief systems? What are the attitudes of the two groups toward each other?

5. *Permanence.*

What is the L2 group's intended length of residence in the target language area?

Schumann used the above factors to describe hypothetically "good" and "bad" language learning situations, and illustrated each situation with two actual cross-cultural contexts. His two hypothetical "bad" language learning situations:

1. The TL group views the L2 group as dominant and the L2 group views itself in the same way. Both groups desire preservation and high enclosure for the L2 group, the L2 group is both cohesive and large, the two cultures are not congruent, the two groups hold negative attitudes toward each other, and the L2 group intends to remain in the TL area only for a short time.

2. The second bad situation has all the characteristics of the first except that in this case, the *L2* group considers itself subordinate and is considered subordinate by the TL group.

A "good" language learning situation, according to Schumann's model (p. 141), is one in which:

-   the L2 group is non-dominant in relation to the TL group

-   both groups desire assimilation (or at least acculturation) for the L2 group

-   low enclosure is the goal of both groups

- the two cultures are congruent

- the L2 group is small and non-cohesive

- both groups have positive attitudes toward each other

- the L2 group intends to remain in the target language area for a long time.

Schumann's hypothesis was that the *greater the* social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language, and conversely, the smaller the social distance, the better the language learning situation will be.

One of the difficulties in Schumann's hypothesis of social distance is the measurement of actual social distance.

To this day the construct has remained a *rather* subjectively defined phenomenon that, like empathy, self-esteem, and so many other psychological constructs, defies definition even though one can intuitively grasp the sense of what is meant.

William Acton (1979) proposed a solution to the dilemma.

Instead of trying to measure *actual* social distance, he devised a measure *of perceived* social distance. His contention was that the actual distance between cultures is not particularly relevant since it is what learners perceive that forms their own reality.

It is a known fact that human beings perceive any cultural environment through the filters and screens of their own world view and then act upon that perception, however biased it may be.

According to Acton, when learners encounter a new culture, their acculturation process is a factor of how they perceive their own culture in relation to the culture of the target language, and vice versa.

For example, objectively there may be a relatively large distance between Americans and Saudi Arabians, but an American learning Arabic in Saudi Arabia might for a number of reasons perceive little distance and in turn act on that perception.

Acton devised a measure of perceived social distance—the Professed Difference in Attitude Questionnaire (PDAQ)—which characterized the "good" or successful language learner (as measured by standard proficiency tests) with remarkable accuracy.

Acton found that the successful language learners see themselves as maintaining some distance between themselves and both cultures.

Acton's theory of optimal perceived social distance supported Lambert's (1967) contention that mastery of the foreign language takes place hand-in-hand with feelings of anomie or homelessness, where learners have moved away from their native culture but are still not completely assimilated into or adjusted to the target culture.

If we combine Acton's research with Lambert's, an interesting hypothesis emerges:

- Mastery or skillful fluency in a second language (within the second culture) occurs somewhere at the beginning of the third—recovery—stage of acculturation.

The implication of such a hypothesis is that:

- learners might never be successful in their mastery of the language if they have proceeded beyond early Stage 3 without accomplishing that linguistic mastery.

Stage 3 may provide not only the optimal distance but the optimal cognitive and affective tension to produce the necessary pressure to acquire the language, pressure that is neither too overwhelming (such as the culture shock typical of Stage 2) nor too weak (which would be found in Stage 4, adaptation/assimilation).

Language mastery at Stage 3, in turn, would appear to be an instrument for progressing psychologically through Stage 3 and finally into Stage 4.

An adult who fails to master a second language in a second culture may have failed to synchronize linguistic and cultural development.

Adults who have achieved nonlinguistic means of coping in the foreign culture will pass through Stage 3 and into Stage 4 with an undue number of fossilized forms of language never achieving mastery.

They have no reason to achieve mastery since they have learned to cope without sophisticated knowledge of the language.

What is suggested in this optimal distance model might well be seen as a culturally based critical-period hypothesis, that is, a critical period that is independent of the age of the learner.

While the optimal distance model applies more appropriately to adult learners, it could pertain to children, although less critically so. Because they have not built up years and years of a culture-bound world view therefore they move through the stages of acculturation more quickly.

While most learners can indeed find positive benefits in cross-cultural living or learning experiences, a number of people experience psychological blocks and other inhibiting effects of the second culture.

Teachers who follow an experiential or process model of culture learning in the classroom can help students turn such an experience into one of increased cultural and self-awareness

Stevick cautioned that learners can feel alienation in the process of learning a second language, alienation from people in their home culture, the target culture, and from themselves.

In teaching an "alien" language, we need to be sensitive to the fragility of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding.

For example: the use of role-play in ESL classrooms, readings, films, simulation games, culture assimilators, etc.

The relationship between language and society cannot be discussed for long without touching on the political ramifications of language and language policy.

Virtually every country has some form of explicit, "official," or implicit, "unofficial," policy affecting the status of its native language(s) and one or more foreign languages.

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LANGUAHE POLICY AND POLITICS

Ultimately those language policies become politicized as special interest groups compete for power and economic gain.

Into this mix, English, now the major worldwide *lingua franca,* is the subject of international debate as policy makers struggle over the legitimization of varieties of English.

The rapid growth of English as an international language (EIL) of communication has stimulated interesting but often controversial discussion about the status of English in its varieties of "what is now commonly called "world Englishes".