

Language and culture in contemporary anthropology: challenges and prospects in foreign language learning

اللغة والثقافة في الأنثروبولوجيا المعاصرة: التحديات والآفاق في تعلم اللغات الأجنبية

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Abstract:

This paper explores the connection between language and culture in modern anthropology, focusing on the difficulties and opportunities it presents in learning foreign languages. Recognizing the relationship between language and culture is important for foreign language students and speakers, as proficiency in the new language extends beyond just linguistic skills. Hence, acquiring cultural competence is also crucial. Nevertheless, grasping the relationship between language and culture can be difficult, particularly in the context of learning a foreign language, as it can impact learners' understanding of their own language and culture. This is especially important in today's field of anthropology, which is closely connected to cultural globalization processes. The article discusses how language and culture are connected in the realm of learning foreign languages in a globalized society. It talks about the difficulties and opportunities of this connection.

Keywords: contemporary anthropology; language and culture; foreign language learning; challenges and prospects.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة العلاقة بين اللغة والثقافة في الأنثروبولوجيا المعاصرة، مع الإشارة بشكل خاص إلى التحديات والآفاق التي قد تتطوي عليها في تعلم اللغة الأجنبية. لا يمكن إنكار أن فهم الارتباط بين اللغة والثقافة أمر مهم لمتعلمي اللغة الأجنبية ومستخدميها لأن الكفاءة في اللغة الهدف تتجاوز تحقيق الكفاءة اللغوية؛ ومن هنا تأتي أهمية اكتساب الكفاءة الثقافية أيضًا. ومع ذلك، بالإشارة إلى المشهد الأنثروبولوجي المعاصر الذي يرتبط بقوة بالعمليات الثقافية المعولمة، قد يكون فهم اللغة والثقافة بالتبادل أمرًا صعبًا، خاصة في تعلم اللغة الأجنبية لأنه يمكن أن يؤثر على اللغة والثقافة الأصلية للمتعلمين. وفي هذا الصدد، تشرح هذه الورقة مفهومي اللغة والثقافة، وتستكشف علاقتهما في تعلم اللغات الأجنبية في ظل العولمة، و بشكل رئيسي من حيث التحديات والآفاق المحتملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأنثروبولوجيا المعاصرة؛ اللغة والثقافة؛ تعلم اللغات الأجنبية؛ التحديات والآفاق.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is important for foreign language learners and users to understand the connection between language and culture. This is because proficiency in a target language requires more than just linguistic competence. Therefore, it is crucial to also acquire cultural competence.

However, understanding language and culture interchangeably may be challenging, especially in foreign language learning, as it can influence learners' awareness of native language and culture. This is particularly relevant in the contemporary anthropological scene, which is strongly linked to globalized cultural processes.

Relevant to this, the present paper aims to explain the concepts of language and culture and explore their relationship within foreign language learning in a globalized world. It focuses on the challenges and prospects of this relationship. The research questions addressed in this paper are:

- Does one world language means one world culture?
- What are the challenges and prospects of learning the culture of a foreign language in the contemporary world?

2. Contemporary Anthropology: Globalization and its Implications

Anthropology is generally seen as the scientific examination of human life, covering behavior, biology, culture, language, and other aspects as they change over time and within different environments. In today's world, anthropology is the academic research of present-day culture and its strong connection to globalization. The latter refers to the interconnection of worldwide economic, political, cultural, and environmental elements that consistently change current circumstances (Steger, 2013).

Inda and Rosaldo (2002) define globalization as a deepening of global interconnectedness, suggesting a society characterized by movement, blending, contact, connections, and ongoing cultural interaction and trade. Moreover, Graham describes globalization as a set of processes that are quickly merging the world into one economic space through greater global trade, the globalization of production and financial markets, and the spread of a commodity culture by a more interconnected global

telecommunications system (cited in Stromquist and Mankman, 2000). This means that in the era of globalization, the world has transformed into a small community that emphasizes the importance of improving communication frequently.

Globalization has greatly influenced different aspects of human life on a global scale. It is crucial to emphasize that all evaluations provided are clearly identified as subjective. It impacts the relationships, environment, political systems, and economic growth and prosperity of societies. Moreover, English has transformed into a predominant universal language and is a crucial element in numerous educational curriculums around the world (Ouahmiche and Bensaad, 2016). Consequently, mastering English as a second language is now a key goal for individuals and communities wanting to engage with the contemporary global society.

Learning English as a worldwide language entails learning its culture, as language and culture are interconnected. The growing fascination with English language education in various countries, including Algeria, stems from its recognition as a universal language. Due to sociolinguistics' contributions to language studies, EFL education now values communicative competence more than ever. This implies that instruction of the target language is not only focused on its basic grammar, but also encompasses its socio-cultural elements. Therefore, language and culture have become interconnected in EFL education.

3. Language and Culture: Inseparable Components

In this context, language is seen not as just a formal system, but as a sociocultural phenomenon. Language is seen as both a societal establishment and a symbolic key to understanding culture (Sapir, 1970, in Stern, 1983). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, developed in the 1950s by Sapir and Whorf, was groundbreaking in enhancing the connection between language and culture. Sapir believes that cultural outlines are reflected in linguistic categories. According to Malinowski, language is closely connected to culture, which means that language cannot be fully understood without taking its cultural background into account (Stern, 1983).

Describing culture as a way of living suggests that it involves the representation of daily behaviors, with language being a crucial element

that cannot be separated. Language plays a crucial role in passing down cultural information through communication. Brown (2000) contends that language and culture are closely connected and cannot be disentangled without diminishing their importance. This perspective is backed up by the assertion that language is intertwined with culture, and culture is intertwined with language (Brown, 2000).

Therefore, language communication is influenced by social and cultural factors. Culture has an impact on everyday language, according to Jiang (2009: 146). Culture brings communication to life. Educators have recently begun to explore the impact of culture on teaching foreign languages (Byram 1989; Byram and Fleming 1998; Kramsch 1993).

Hence, taking into account the sociocultural context is crucial when instructing a second language, as it serves as more than just a structural system but a method of sharing human experiences. Acquiring knowledge of a foreign language entails gaining an understanding of a foreign culture. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), language and culture are both acquired simultaneously, aiding in the growth of each other (cited in Thang, 2009).

Consequently, it is not possible to comprehend or acquire a language without connecting it to its corresponding culture. Moeller and Catalano (2015) claim that acquiring a new language allows individuals to gain insight from different viewpoints, enhance the capacity to make connections between various subjects, and foster a multidisciplinary outlook alongside developing intercultural awareness. Moreover, culture is considered a standard for foreign language learning in the 21st century by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Understanding language and culture is crucial for effective communication, which involves knowing the appropriate time, method, and reason for interacting with various individuals (Cagac, 2018).

In this context, it is evident that in language instruction or acquisition, it is important to familiarize oneself with the relevant culture (Valverde, 2005). In addition, the significance of culture in foreign language education

has grown as our knowledge of language and communication has advanced (Clouston, 1997). Hence, incorporating the target language's culture is crucial in teaching foreign languages. According to Genc and Bada (2005), instructing a foreign language without integrating its cultural aspects is not accurate or thorough.

Thus, acquiring a second language is unquestionably cross-cultural. In simpler terms, it enables learners to engage with a new realm and acquire understanding and insight into a specific culture. Moreover, it allows for smooth and proficient interaction with individuals who speak the language fluently.

Nevertheless, there may be difficulties in FLL when trying to understand language and culture as interconnected, especially in today's globalized world.

4. Language and Culture within FLL: Challenges and Prospects

4.1. Importance of Culture in FL Education:

Multiple researchers (Byram 1991, Byram and Fleming 1998, Kramsch 1993) have stated that it is not feasible to teach a foreign language without also teaching its culture. Hence, including culture in foreign language teaching is essential for improving learners' communication skills and building intercultural competency.

Issaiass et al. (2003) claimed that teaching a foreign language involves more than just speaking and understanding words, but also understanding different cultures and being able to empathize with others, including the ability to understand 'the other' and *savoir-être*. Teaching culture in this scenario would not just improve learners' grammar and communication skills, but also help them gain cultural knowledge, ultimately boosting their intercultural competence and understanding of other cultures.

- **Intercultural competence:**

Including cultural aspects in foreign language education broadens the goal of language learning beyond just gaining communication skills. Intercultural competence is also included and is described by Meyer (1991) as the capability to adaptively manage the behaviors, beliefs, and viewpoints of individuals from different cultures (cited in Kurt, et al., 2009).

Byram (1997) contends that effective communication goes beyond simply sharing information. It also involves the capacity to comprehend and value the other person's viewpoint on their own culture, as well as foresee and address any communication or behavioral problems. Byram suggests a model of intercultural communicative competence that is interdisciplinary and consists of five factors. As outlined by Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence encompasses understanding, beliefs, abilities for interpreting and connecting, abilities for discovering and interacting, and political awareness, which includes critical cultural awareness. Individuals with this skill set demonstrate various emotional, behavioral, and thinking capabilities, including understanding of communication, appreciation for diversity, and adaptability (Byram, 2006, in Thang, 2009).

Gaston (1984) explains intercultural competence as acknowledging that culture impacts how we see things and shapes our values, attitudes, and actions (as cited in Valverde 2005). Gaston suggests that this results in an increased intercultural awareness among learners.

- **Cultural awareness:**

Based on Gaston's perspective, the acquisition of intercultural competence by learners leads to intercultural awareness. He describes it as the capacity to recognize that individuals behave differently because of their varying perspectives shaped by their surroundings and cultural background (ibid).

It can be understood that having intercultural awareness means recognizing the connection between students' own culture and the community they are studying, acknowledging both similarities and differences. Students should exhibit a thorough comprehension of their own culture and how it is viewed by others, as well as the ability to see the target culture through the eyes of its inhabitants. All cultures are anticipated to engage in reaching the goal of educating and learning about culture in order to enhance intercultural understanding among diverse human communities in this scenario.

Hence, foreign language learners must also immerse themselves in the foreign culture in order to fully grasp the language, as language acquisition is intertwined with cultural understanding. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that learners must maintain their dedication to their own culture. Byram and Morgan (1994) argue that learners cannot just give up their own culture and completely take on another, as their culture is a fundamental aspect of their identity as social individuals (cited in Ariza, 2007)

Moreover, as Gee (1988) points out, the language instructor is interfering with the essential aspects of human identity by helping the student explore new viewpoints and personas. As stated by Chlopek (2008), the EFL instructor must conscientiously incorporate culture into foreign language learning with skill and sensitivity. Certainly, both educators and students need to be mindful of the potential challenges that may arise when incorporating cultural elements into the foreign language classroom.

4.2. Which Culture to Learn/to Teach?

This query is raised due to the fact that a language group can be made up of different subgroups. As noted by Valverde in 2005, Brown in 2000 pointed out that the selection of which culture to study or instruct is influenced by the social distance separating the learner's own culture from the culture being targeted. Brown (2000) describes social distance as the cognitive and emotional closeness between two cultures that an individual encounters.

It is crucial to thoroughly evaluate the elements of the target culture and how they relate to the learners' own culture. This issue needs to be discussed in the syllabus creation stage, particularly in the assessment of learners' requirements. Hence, it is essential to focus on the students' sociocultural perceptions of both the target culture and their own culture at this stage. The selection and integration of suitable cultural content in the foreign language classroom should be based on this ground. The next step should focus on determining the best approach to integrate culture into the classroom.

Hence, in order to achieve intercultural competence, individuals need

to have both linguistic skills and communicative abilities. Communicative Language Teaching is strongly advised for incorporating cultural teachings into foreign language classrooms, with the latter serving as its cornerstone. This method focuses on collaborative tasks and verbal teaching, necessitating students to excel in culturally relevant communication and conduct in the target society (Clouston, 1997). Peck (1984) promotes the use of active learning in the FL classroom, arguing that activities that emphasize active learning are more effective than passive ones. He recommends integrating culture by engaging students' curiosity, focus, and involvement. Peck suggests engaging in sensory experiences of foreign cultures, rather than solely focusing on listening to the language (ibid):

Cultural Islands: Teachers are required to establish a cultural background by utilizing visual aids like images, posters, maps, and other real objects to assist students in conceptualizing the foreign culture

Celebrating Festivals: In this exercise, students gain knowledge about different cultures by participating in foreign festivals with activities like making posters and beautifying the classroom.

Kinesics and Body Language: This exercise highlights the importance of understanding the use of gestures as a form of communication without using words. Since culture consists of verbal and non-verbal communication, it is crucial to take into account both types (ibid, 4).

Culture Capsules: Its main focus is on teaching culture through comparison by highlighting the distinctions between native and foreign cultures.

Cultural Consciousness Raising: This involves explaining and maturing students' views on the target culture, ultimately fostering intercultural comprehension.

While these activities may appear attractive initially, they can in fact worsen psychological problems for students. Misunderstandings and negative cultural beliefs frequently cause these problems, leading to a larger divide between the learners' own culture and the one associated with the target language. Fully eradicating these issues may prove unattainable, as

they surpass the confines of the foreign language classroom. The main reasons behind these problems are mainly connected to the learners' social surroundings, particularly their family.

4.3. Culture in FLL: Psychological Problems

Learning a foreign language and its culture can be psychologically challenging for learners. The effect of these obstacles may differ based on the degree of interaction with the culture being studied. Schumann (1978) introduced the idea of acculturation, a concept that Johnson (1992) simplified as the more one acculturates, the more proficient they become in the language. Nevertheless, this may not always be the case and could result in the opposite outcome.

Acculturation involves the acquisition of a secondary identity, as stated by Brown (2000). This can help learners improve their language skills by connecting them with the target community. Conversely, the adoption of a second identity through cultural assimilation could be seen as a challenge to the learners' personal identity. According to the same source, encountering a different culture can disturb an individual's worldview, self-identity, and ways of thinking, behaving, feeling, and communicating (p. 183).

This interruption could result in issues like confusion and a clash of cultures. Misunderstanding is when the values and beliefs of the target community are interpreted incorrectly. Cultural shock can lead to feelings of alienation, frustration, anger, isolation, longing for home, and even physical ailment (ibid.). The learner might feel conflicted between their cultural identity and the target language. In the phase of determining course content, course designers need to take into account learners' sociocultural representations that were identified during the needs analysis stage in order to minimize misunderstandings and cultural shock.

In the end, incorporating culture into foreign language classes can result in the issue of stereotyping. According to Brown (2000), a stereotype is when group characteristics are attributed to individuals solely based on their cultural affiliation, acting as a simplified and generalized assumption. Stereotyping supports a narrow-minded perspective on cross-cultural

variances. Regarding this matter, Berger (1997) contends that the adoption of stereotypes is a prevalent and thoughtless mode of thinking. Misunderstandings and conflicts may arise if cultural differences are not recognized or comprehended by both students and educators. Consequently, the focus of cultural education should be on valuing and honoring the diverse qualities of people.

Furthermore, even though language instructors cannot manage the adverse consequences of teaching culture, they can make an effort to reduce their influence on students by adjusting their teaching approaches to cater to their requirements. This will assist learners in adapting to the culture they are targeting. The teacher's approach can either amplify or diminish the psychological issues resulting from teaching the target culture.

Hence, FL teachers are required to address these problems by using particular classroom strategies. Cullen (2000) recommends different communication exercises to teach foreign cultures, including quizzes, reformulation, noticing, prediction, research, games, role play, and reading tasks. In order to efficiently carry out these activities, teachers are encouraged by Cullen (2000) to take into account the practical suggestions provided:

- Personalization, i.e. to allow students relate learnt issues to their own lives.
- Activities not just discussions
- Suitable level of difficulty
- Make it interesting
- Group work
- Avoid attempting to address every aspect; instead, provide a few ways to delve deeper into understanding the culture.
- Understand the language and culture of your students and recognize your own cultural biases; in other words, teachers should avoid imposing their own beliefs without first trying to comprehend their students' beliefs.

Furthermore, the utilization of authentic materials is essential in addition to the methods and exercises mentioned for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Robjatjazi (2008) pointed out that genuine materials have a higher chance of cultivating students' different viewpoints and transforming them into intercultural communicators. They have the ability to bring students closer to the genuine language.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper explored how language and culture are interconnected in modern global anthropology, focusing on the difficulties and opportunities within the field of FLL. Further examination and analysis are needed on the subject.

Studying a foreign language can improve understanding of the connection between language and culture, and offer insights into different cultures. It can expand students' individual perspectives and assist in shaping them into global inhabitants. Moreover, learning a foreign language is a successful method to overcome language and cultural differences. Interacting with a different culture can also result in a better comprehension of one's own culture. Hence, learning a new language can serve as a beneficial instrument for adjusting to a different culture and society.

Yet, acquiring knowledge of the customs and dialect could result in numerous mental obstacles that must be approached with caution. Acculturation is a challenge that may lead learners to take on a second identity, posing a risk to their own sense of self. Exposure to a different culture can result in misunderstandings and potentially culture shock.

In summary, it can be advantageous to learn a foreign language and understand a different culture. Nevertheless, maintaining one's identity is equally crucial.

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