


Cultural Identity in the Context of Language and Accent

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Abstract: *Languages have always been very important in all communities. Language and culture have a close relationship and have an impact on society. Identity perceptions are derived from culture. Language is a product of culture that has the power to influence and interpret it. Identity is a multifaceted term that is influenced by social and political situations, historical events, familial dynamics, and individual traits.*

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Introduction

The majority of people use language as a tool for understanding the world. Since language and culture have a close relationship and have an impact on society, this is the reason it has been studied for many generations.

Languages have always been very important in all communities. Prior to now, learning a second language was a method to pick up new vocabulary and improve interpersonal communication skills. However, people now acquire languages for a variety of reasons, based on their personal interests. People who speak two or more languages tend to speak them in order to access different cultures and take advantage of additional work prospects as a result of globalization.

One aspect of culture is language. Identity perceptions are derived from culture. Language is a product of culture, and culture has the power to influence and interpret it. Our language and the things we say influence our reality, ideas, and behavior. Language and culture are inseparable since the former represents the latter and is a national characteristic. Thus, the language-based cultural identity is the result of forced association.

Culture and dialect are intricately linked and dependent upon one another. It is a manifestation and articulation of history, tradition, and cultural elements. Phonetic differences are a trait of a different culture and are used to describe groups of people who live next to each other or in different settings within a similar nation.

Identity and Its Importance

In our modern society, the word "identity" is used a lot. Identity can be defined simply as the characteristics and attributes that define who we are. But this basic description falls short of the intricacy of the concept of identity. It is important to remember that the meaning of identity has changed significantly over time. In the past, a person's identity was frequently limited by their social class or line of work. But since then, the concept of identity has evolved to include a wide range of elements that influence how people view themselves.

However, in modern times, we recognize that identity is composed of numerous elements, such as: Social status, education, family history, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion nationality, and personal values, and views are all factors that must be considered.

In the context of linguistics, social identity encompasses participant roles, positions, relationships, reputations, and other dimensions of social personae, which are conventionally linked to epistemic and affective stances. Identity is defined as the foundation upon which the self is built. Along with reason, it is a stable and cohesive core that permits human interaction with other people in the surroundings.

Identity is a multifaceted term that is influenced by social and political situations, historical events, familial dynamics, and individual traits. In this context Beverly has given some hints or questions regarding identity: "Who am I? The answer mostly relies on my identity as perceived by others. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my

neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether?" (Beverly Daniel Tatum, 2000).

Furthermore, the identity of an individual is crucial to their ability to exercise their rights and obligations in a modern society in a fair and equitable manner. As it gives us access to basic human rights like healthcare, pensions, social benefits, voting rights, and more, it is essential for social, economic, and digital inclusion. However, in order to exercise those rights, an individual must be able to provide proof of their identity.

What is Language?

Language is a unique cognitive ability of humans structuring a system of communication which is composed of vocabulary and grammar. It is the primary mode that people express meaning, both when they speak and when they write. Cultural variety and historical changes over time have resulted in notable differences in human language usage.

In the words of Aristotle, "A language is a structured system of communication used by humans. Languages consist of spoken sounds in spoken languages or written elements in written languages. Language is a speech sound produced by human beings in order to express their ideas, emotions, thoughts, desires and feelings".

As Chomsky defines, "Language is the inherent capability of the native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences"; whereas, Encyclopedia Britannica's definition says, "Language is a system of conventional or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of social groups and participants in its culture, communicate" (as cited by Rao, CS, 2021).

Language and Culture

It is to realize how important the association between language and culture is. Language and culture are intrinsically intertwined. Lacking initially mastering a language, one cannot comprehend a culture. A given language is typically connected to a specific ethnicity. When you communicate in the language of the speaker, you engage with their culture. Acquiring knowledge of a foreign language requires not only understanding the target community's culture and customs but also its alphabet, word order, and grammar standards. Since language is firmly ingrained in society, it is essential to comprehend that culture when studying or teaching a language.

The fact that multiple languages are used in the same civilization demonstrates how culture influences language. A number of influences are evident in the language with regard to pronunciation, dialects, and accents. Cultural groups have different approaches to teaching language in order to comprehend the subject.

One's identity and personality are determined by their culture and language. As a matter of fact, every human being is born in the same manner and goes through the same life stages. The context in which each person develops his or her common language makes a difference. The environment is essential to the formation of culture. Language links cultures by adapting to shifting demands and fashions. Language reflects how we talk and express ourselves in different contexts and at different times, but culture represents how we live and think.

It is true that language and culture go together if it is everyday conversation or the folklore of a particular country. There must be some sort of logical connection between language and culture. Both of these, after all, frequently characterize an individual as well as their beliefs, customs, routines, and pretty much everything else about their everyday lives.

The non-lexical aspect of speech that is unique to each culture is known as paralinguage, and it is a very large topic. The paralinguage varies according to one's upbringing. We pick up some gestures, expressions, and intonations from the individuals around us. In one country, body language that is hostile might be interpreted as friendly in another. This is the reason why miscommunication between different ethnic groups can result from paralinguage. Paralinguage has a big impact on the language you speak since it encompasses things like tone, intonation, speaking rate, facial expressions, gestures, and hesitation noises.

Culture and Accent

Learning one's native tongue or a foreign language is an integral part of culture since language and culture are intrinsically interconnected.

... Culture is a system of societal rules and behavior. ... It is what people believe, how they act and interact, and the way they live, with specific traits, behaviors, attitudes, and traditions passed on through the generations of families. It is some element that closely linked with language with which it has dependent relationship (Kun, 2013).

Since language is culture and vice versa, as Kun claimed, these cultural components that are communicated by language are shown in the way that a subject speaks in both their native and second language. This means that a person's accent serves as a metaphor for their identity, worldview, and set of ideas. As a result, Kun (2013) states the following regarding language and culture:

“...The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to through, for example, a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures, and facial expressions”.

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Similarly, accents can reveal a subject's origins just as much as manners, proverbs, and gestures typical of a language.

The accent, subsequently, is an expression of a language's culture and, as such, the identity of the speaker because it conveys information about the social group to which the person belongs and their worldview. Therefore, in L2 conversations, learners of second languages establish their social affiliation by their accent (Aydemir, 2013).

“Perceptions of identity are often reflected in a person's accent, in other words, the way a person speaks represents the way she/he views him/herself in relation to both the native and target language cultures”.

In this regard, this is primarily observed in the case of optional bilinguals, who acquire a language within the framework of their first language and whose mother tongue accent naturally translates to their second language, demonstrating strong ties to their identity and culture.

Variation between Accent and Pronunciation

Distinguishing between accents and pronunciations is something that is challenging. However, it's critical to distinguish between these phrases because most people have misconceptions about them that have hindered learners' attempts to become fluent in a second language in a number of ways.

A person's speech pattern, including how they employ phonological elements like intonation, rhythm, tone, and stress, is referred to as their accent. It's a common misconception that people with accents are exclusively foreigners or immigrants. Everyone has an accent when they speak; and there is no such thing as non-accent (Kumaravadivelu, 2004).

On the other hand, while speaking to others orally, having a clear pronunciation of the foreign language is essential. According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (2001), pronunciation is the creation of meaningful sounds in two senses: it is employed to achieve meaning in contexts of usage and is a part of a particular language's code.

As per AMEP (2002), the creation of sounds that humans employ to convey meaning is known as pronunciation. In its broadest sense, it encompasses attention to gestures and expressions that are closely associated with language use, as well as specific language sounds (segments), aspects of speech that go beyond the level of a single sound, such as intonation, phrasing, stress, timing, and rhythm (suprasegmental aspects), and the projection of the voice (voice quality).

Based on the definitions of the two notions mentioned above, it appears that pronunciation and accent have similarities to each other, yet there is a diverse distinction between the two. Therefore, an accent is simply the way a person emphasizes a language, a prosodic trait that is generated depending on the person's familiarity with a certain geographic or regional position. Pronunciation, on the other hand, refers to the way articulators are positioned to produce sounds, how humans pronounce and articulate sounds, and how they convey meaning in usage situations.

Conclusion

Various studies reveal that language and culture have a close relationship and have an impact on society. Identity perceptions are derived from culture and language is a product of culture which has the power to

influence and interpret it. Language and culture are inseparable since the former represents the latter and is a national characteristic. Culture is a system of societal rules and behavior; and it is what people believe, how they act and interact; and the way they live, with specific traits, behaviors, attitudes and traditions.

Pronunciation and accent have similarities to each other, yet there is a diverse distinction between the two. Therefore, an accent is simply the way a person emphasizes a language, a prosodic trait that is generated depending on the person's familiarity with a certain geographic or regional position. Pronunciation refers to the way articulators are positioned to produce sounds and how they convey meaning in usage situations. Thus, identity is a multifaceted term that is influenced by social and political situations, historical events, familial dynamics and individual traits. One's identity is known and influenced by various aspects such as language, accent, culture, ethnicity, traditions and customs and so on.

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