



Language, Literature, Culture and Globalization

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Abstract

Language, verbal or non-verbal, is central to the survival of mankind because it is an important tool for communication, negotiation and the transfer or preservation of the literary as well as cultural heritage of a people from one generation to the other. The relationship between language, literature and culture is so strong to the extent that a change in one ultimately affects the other two. Every language directly mirrors the culture it serves - a language either enriches or impoverishes the culture it serves. Therefore, the influence of language on the culture and literature of a people has dire consequences for the sustenance or development of their indigenous education. The present paper aims to explore a deeper meaning of culture, the relationship between culture and language, the relationship between culture and literature and the role of English language in globalization process.

Key words: *Cultural heritage, language, literature, culture, globalization*

The relationship between culture, language and literature cannot be overemphasized. Culture shows itself in everything - language, literature, performing arts, verbal and non-verbal behaviour of people, etc. We not only represent but also embody our respective cultures. In the globalized world, awareness and mastery of a country's cultural norms, including linguistic culture, provides a person with access to services, ceremonies, traditions, and an unlimited number of other cultural dimensions that would be otherwise unavailable. The beliefs groups of people have about how they use and interpret language defines linguistic culture.

Arjun Appadurai prefers to define "Globalization as a multi-way process involving flows of ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, messages, technologies and techniques." (Appadurai, 2001, 5). The world has become a global village. Gone are those times when every nation

was like an island. People in the past did not require communicating with people from other cultures like we do today. Today, people travel from their own countries to other countries for employment, business, tourism, etc. They need to communicate with people from various cultures and so need to be aware of the fact that cultures differ in many ways. What is considered acceptable, polite and appropriate in one culture may not be considered so in another culture. Patterns of behaviour reflect varying perceptions of the principles of power and solidarity. This multiplicity of cultures and plurality of norms of verbal and non-verbal behaviour necessitate training in intercultural communication. Literature, which embodies aspects of the culture of its origin, can be used as a rich resource to develop the ability to communicate appropriately in alien cultural settings.

Culture is like gravity. We do not experience it unless we jump two metres into the air. It jolts us out of our complacency when we are uprooted from our own milieu and planted into another, either temporarily or permanently. It is so glutinous that it sticks to us from womb to tomb. Although, we can integrate ourselves into our adopted culture to some extent, our own culture stays with us perennially, follows us like our own shadow, wherever we go. Consequently, each one of us is an ambassador of our own culture. Our cultural identity peeps through our personal as well as interpersonal behaviour, both verbal and non-verbal.

As Patil (2002) says, culture, like a banana flower or onion, exists in layers. We can only understand it if we peel it layer by layer, cover by cover. However, it is easier said than done. The outer layer is easy to perceive as it comprises concrete and tangible manifestations like art, monuments, food, language, etc. The middle layer consists of norms and values, and hence it takes us some time to unfold it. The inner layer is rather difficult to penetrate because it subsumes assumptions about birth, life, death, happiness, unhappiness, and so on. Culture is a very complex phenomenon. It takes even the most thoughtful, honest and introspective person many years to understand even a small part of their own culture.

Language and culture are as inseparable as dance and dancer. It is this inseparability which offers English language teachers opportunities to familiarize their learners with various cultures, and lexical, idiomatic, grammatical and pragmatic properties of different varieties of the English language.

The most widely accepted views on the relationship of language and culture are probably those of Malinowski (1964) whose focus on the study of culture as a system led him to the conclusion that linguistic behaviour could best be delineated and interpreted in its appropriate socio-cultural contexts. Thus the basic tenet of Malinowski's functional theory that all aspects of culture are interconnected is perhaps the most

widely prevalent idea in cultural linguistics. Language, then, is a part, product and vehicle of culture. Therefore, it is essential to take into account the relevant socio-cultural contexts of their communication (Behura, 1986). Implementation and violation of communicative rules and the positive and negative sanctions of language should obviously be considered in specific cultural contexts (Albert, 1972) because language is nothing but a set of social conventions (Lander, 1966). As Grimshaw's (1971) diagrammatic representation of the relationship between language and reality shows, reality creates language and language creates reality; reality creates culture and culture creates reality; and language creates culture and culture creates language. Language, therefore, must be investigated within the social context of the community that uses it.

Literature is a slice of life; it holds a mirror to life. Literature, they say, is a seismograph of the society it portrays. George Bernard Shaw was perhaps one of the best advocates of the 'literature for life' camp. His plays were professedly propaganda plays, which aimed at exposing and correcting social follies and foibles. Charles Dickens' novels depicted the contemporary social realities. Thomas Hardy's novels are yet another example. His fiction reflects the conditions prevalent during its production. These conditions include climatic conditions as well. In fact, weather is an important character in Hardy's novels. As we know, sunny weather being a rare condition in Britain, it is a dominant topic of British conversations. Therefore, there are many words to refer to sunlight – shine, gleam, glisten, glitter, glimmer, shimmer, etc. Summer in India gives you a scorching experience whereas summer in Britain offers you a pleasant experience. That is why in one of his sonnets Shakespeare says to his 'dark lady': "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" In the context of British weather, this line will be interpreted as a positive rhetorical question, as a compliment; but in the context of Indian weather, it will be construed as a question carrying negative connotations. Thus, literature is loaded with cultural connotations and assumptions.

Globalization is a process of the integration of different cultures, languages, organizations, countries, etc from across the globe. Due to the globalization everyone is connected in the world for the sake of personal and business. Influence of Globalization is everywhere. English language has a great impact of globalization. Naturally English Language teaching has its own changes in globalized world. Because of globalization vast number of students has started learning English as a second language and foreign language. Arjun Appadurai prefers to define "globalization as a multi-way process involving flows of ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, messages, technologies and techniques." (Appadurai, 2001, 5).

On the one hand, the new era of globalization provides us with loads of new opportunities to share and exchange our knowledge, findings, experience or ideas with anyone from another part of the globe. Against a background of rapid technological change, globalization and resulting cross-cultural interaction in recent decades has dramatically impacted the types of communication skills needed.

On the other hand, no longer can people afford to simply communicate well within their own homogenous cultures. Today, they need to understand the dynamics of long-distance collaboration, the impact of culture on manners of speaking and body language, and how to use technology to communicate with people on the other side of the globe. As globalization has introduced virtual communication and collaboration as a major part of workplace dynamics, it is necessary to understand the challenges of virtual interactions, to be aware of subtle nuances of people's manner of speech when communicating across cultures and of cultural differences in body language, to understand the information needs according to the communication styles of different countries or cultures.

Language as the substance of culture contributes to its formation through vocabulary, greetings or humour, serves as important symbols of group belonging, and forms the people's cultural

identity. Languages are the essential medium of communication in which the ability to act across cultures develops. Mastering several languages enables people to open their personal horizons, to think globally, and to increase their own self-awareness and understanding of their neighbours. Languages are, thus, the very lifeline of globalization: without language (as a means of communication), globalization would have been impossible.

In its turn, globalization has significant effects on language, both positive and negative, which influence the culture of the language in many ways. While allowing some languages and their cultures to spread and dominate on a global scale, globalization is also blamed for leading to the extinction of other languages and cultures. Among the most obvious effects of globalization on the world's languages the students mention the impact on minority languages, loss of uniformity among the big languages, disregard of linguistic forms and styles richness and diversity, and decline in foreign language learning among English speakers.

To sum up briefly, although not a new phenomenon, globalization has become the increasing trend in all the walks of life. One of the most important components of globalization is international communication, and the worldwide spreading of information would be hardly possible without the language, which is commonly understood and serves as a medium of communication across cultures. Language is basic to social interactions, affecting them and being affected by them.

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