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The Relationship between Language and Culture

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Introduction

How to understand the relationship between language and culture

When we talk about pragmatics, we touch very important elements of people because we are talking about language and culture. The exact nature of this relationship between language and culture remains difficult to determine. We can use the very broad definition of Williams (1981): "Culture is the whole way of life of a people and language is definitely part of culture. So culture and language have many common points, such as: non-nature, knowledge, communication. Neither culture nor language are part of our biological heritage. So, they are unnatural but acquired and therefore they are the result of learning and therefore they are knowledge. Culture and language are two mental realities: the organization of this knowledge allows you to perceive and relate them to each other. Therefore, the one who lives the culture and speaks the language in addition to knowing things, shares the way of thinking, of interpreting the world, of making inferences and predictions. as mental realities made by learned and transmitted signs are in all respects "communication". Language and culture allow to establish symbolic relationships between individuals and collectivities, between situations and objects. However, language and culture are not the same: for example, the water tap and the storm of Giorgione are two cultural objects, while the smile, the greeting, and the bow are two cultural behaviors. In these cases, language has nothing to do with it, whereas when we understand culture as a cognitive-interpretative practice of reality, language occupies a privileged place because it is the best system of classification and communication of the experience, we have available. To study the link between language and culture, it is necessary to separate them and operationalize these entities in order to see if specific cultural elements can be connected with specific linguistic elements in harmony with the motto "live culture and speak the language".

Culture

Culture finds in the definition of Tylor (1871) a broad definition very useful for our work: "culture, or civilization, in the ethnographic sense, is that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capacity and habit acquired by man as a member of society. The comparative dimension as well as the level of analysis, i.e. micro or macro analysis, has always been of great importance in the study of culture. Usually, the micro level is accompanied by the qualitative method while the macro plan is accompanied by the quantitative method.

The concept of culture as Fabietti reminds us (2004) has become very controversial but remains useful if it is used in a dynamic, open, negotiating, inventive way in this period of great mobility and where the cultural

territories are not well-defined. In the intercultural context, the comparative approach is undoubtedly the most suitable as well as the quantitative approach to understand the general orientations that characterize entire nations. For these reasons, Bettoni (2006) chooses the Hofstede model (2001) as it operationalizes some cultural dimensions on a large scale. This must help us to combine linguistic facts with cultural elements. For Hofstede (2001) culture is understood as the collective programming of the mind, where the mind is understood as: head thinking, the heart that feels, hands that act.

With their respective consequences in terms of beliefs, feelings, and abilities. Culture is not directly observable but it is possible to observe the manifestations, behaviors, and life practices and from these go back to the program. At the center of the Hofstede model, we find the values, which always have a polar character, positive or negative, good or bad, good or bad, safety or danger, rationality or irrationality, logical or paradoxical.

These values have two properties:

- intensity (strength of value in our life)
- direction (orientation of our actions)

If we adhere to a value, our involvement can be greater or lesser (question of intensity) and the result can be good or bad (question of direction). For example, for some or many, owning a lot of money can be very important (strong intensity), and owning more is positive while the opposite is negative. For others, it may be quite the opposite. Furthermore, values are never isolated but form a system of values or hierarchies. These values do not always live in harmony:- for example, one can adhere to the value of "freedom" and "equality" and live this as a contradiction within one's own ideological and behavioral way. In fact, there are the desired values and the desired values. Values become observable when they are transformed into practices. For Hofstede (2001) there are three ways to obtain visible manifestations of culture: rituals, heroes. symbols

In proximity to values, we find rituals, which are technically useless collective activities but which are considered socially necessary to link the individual to the community. For example, holidays, ceremonies, processions, festivals, local markets, greetings, visits with friends have this function. The second layer is occupied by heroes, real or imaginary characters, living or dead, who have characteristics coveted by that culture and become models of behavior. For example: Valentino Rossi, Baggio, Madre Teresa, Papa Francesco, Benigni, Massimo Troisi, Pino Daniele, Lucio Battisti, Mina, Celentano.

Further, we find the symbols, words, gestures, figures and objects whose often complex meanings are recognized as such only by those who share culture. The slogans, the clothes we wear are all examples of symbols, which are found on the outside because they can change more quickly. These symbols, heroes, and rites are visible but their cultural significance is visible only within a given culture. The stability of this culture is very strong although changes are possible. From this stability will arise the institutions of a given culture such as the family, education systems, religion, political systems, and legislation. These institutions tend to strengthen the social norms (value system) and ecological (natural) conditions that led to their formation (history, demography, nutrition, economics, hygiene, urbanization, technology) For example, Italy of the last century lived on the one hand the transition from fascism to monarchy to land on the Republic. This has brought radical institutional changes on the one hand but on the other hand, little has changed in the social norms of daily life. This model finds its stability in history: "Culture as programming of the mind is also the crystallization of history in the head, heart and hands of the present generation (Hofstede, 2001). Over time it will be possible to change but individually, behaviors change and not so much the values. To offer an example of operationalization we see how Hofstede (2001) identified five dimensions along which cultures are arranged in an important way. These cultural dimensions correspond to the major problems that each society faces but to which each gives different answers:

Distance from power, that is, it is considered how much the less powerful members of an organization, an institution or institution accept and expect that power is distributed unequally; thus, the degree of inequality with which a given society works and the emotional dependence on the most powerful people are brought into

focus. The avoidance of uncertainty, that is the cultural dimension that considers how much a culture programs its member's tolerance towards unstructured, new unknown, different, unpredictable situations, in this way, the degree of control that a society seeks is identified to exercise on what is uncontrollable. Individualism, unlike collectivism, considers the degree to which the individual knows how to look after himself or remains integrated in the group usually made up of the family. masculinity which, unlike femininity, considers the distribution of emotional roles between the two genders; so "hard" male societies are opposed to "soft" female societies.

temporal orientation as a cultural dimension considers how long a culture programs its members to accept the deferral of gratification of their material, social and emotional needs.

From these works, interesting elements emerged along the axis of the individualism-collectivism dimension, in particular with reference to the most individualistic cultures, these characteristics are found: Regarding personality: normality lies in comparison rather than in the search for harmony and one is encouraged to express happiness rather than sadness in the family: weddings are based on love rather than agreed upon and privacy rather than companionship is sought.

at school: individual initiative is encouraged and never discouraged, and the purpose of education is to learn rather than learn to do.

In general, the emphasis is on fun rather than duty, a sense of guilt rather than a sense of shame.

A very important variable remains the wealth of a nation to evaluate this data very carefully. Before ending with this topic of culture it will be important to keep three questions in mind, namely ethnocentrism, prejudice, and stereotype.

In fact, when we observe a different culture, we can only observe it ethnocentrically from the point of view of ours, thus becoming entangled in an implicit judgment on the other culture. Only by suspending judgment until cultural differences have been understood in their roots and consequences can we partly avoid ethnocentric prejudice. It is also very important to expose your results to the scrutiny of other scholars with other value systems and to be as explicit as possible about your value system. Another lurking risk is the stereotype with its process of attributing the same characteristics to all members of a community. In fact, the study of stereotypes, proper and others, fully falls within the study of culture (Mazzara, 1997).

Language

Language is the most visible and powerful symbol of a culture. When we study a language, we can analyze the form and its functions. When we talk about shapes we mean sounds, words and grammatical structures. For the functions of the language, we can say that the language is used for:- to represent reality, to communicate, expressing emotions, feelings, attitudes, passions, establish and maintain interpersonal contact perform actions, manifest one's identity.

With the referential function we represent ourselves in the mind, discriminate, classify, conceptualize reality. Words are the content of our message, called "referent" because it refers to extra-linguistic entities. For example, linguistically and mentally there are sirens or Neptune but it does not mean that they exist in reality. The sun, the beach, the sea are all words that represent a conceptual elaboration of our perceptions.

With the communication function, we transmit to others the informative content of the message fact, according to Wittgenstein (1967), language is nothing more or less than its intended use. Between these two functions today there is a greater balance between the scholars of language in terms of adherence to these two functions. Furthermore, in this century the other functions of the language were

highlighted. For example, in the expressive function, language is used to manifest emotions, feelings, passions, and attitudes. Today many linguists believe that through the phonic expression of emotions, the speaker manifests an important part of himself and the contents of his communicative act. The fatigue function of the language is used to express social relationships, to establish or keep the communion of intent alive, to signal good intentions towards the interlocutor. Classic examples of fatigued use of the language are pleasantries, greetings, thanks, comments on the weather or stereotypical compliments. Even very routinized gossip falls under this fatigue function by the simple fact of being pronounced. The study of the fatigue function allows us to analyze the context of word enunciation. With the performative function, we try to exercise linguistically our control over reality. The clearest examples are the formulas recited during the rites such as:

"This is my body" pronounced in church, "in the name of the Italian people" by the judge before a sentence; "in the name of the magnificent rector"; the "yes" pronounced during the marriage is an act that changes identity to the speaker. This function was highlighted by Austin with his thesis that "saying is always doing" because when we talk, we always do actions, that is, we inform, threaten, ask, apologize, joke, insult, keep in touch. Language as action is the heart of this function. Language as a form of identity serves to reveal to others who we are individually and to which group we belong socially. When we speak, we offer a lot of information about ourselves: the gender and age in our voice, the chosen words, the pronunciation reveals the regional origin, ethnicity, social status, and the role we want to play in general. In short, language works as a means of representing, communicating, expressing, contacting, acting, and identifying.

Language and thought

Language and thought to represent a much-discussed nexus above all in light of two profound opposing philosophical tendencies such as those of universalism and relativism. On the one hand, we have Enlightenment universalism (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant) in which it is argued that for innate gifts we all reason in the same way and that thought informs the language. On the other hand, we find romantic relativism which, following the English philosophers (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume), denies the innatism of the mental categories and maintains that knowledge is acquired through experience. Therefore, if the experience is different the way of thinking will be different. This linguistic relativism found expression in the theses of Sapir and Whorf (1949, 1956).

For Sapir (1949) the real world is largely built on the linguistic habits of the group. For Whorf (1956) the principle of linguistic relativity is inscribed in the grammars of the speakers, who are directed towards different types of observations and different evaluations of very similar acts of observation. These observations lead to different interpretations of the world. This relativist position is widespread in the anthropological, sociological and pragmatic fields. These two positions contrast radically in ideological terms. Positively, universalism guarantees equality and respects races, cultures, and languages by glossing on differences.

Negatively, the rationalist heritage sees the difference in a "diachronic" sense, that is to say, that the differences are bridged with time. As for relativism, is it positively respectful of differences while negatively it risks incommunicability because if cultures understand differently how can they understand each other?

These two extremisms are incapable of explaining the real, that is, on the one hand the undoubted cultural and linguistic differences, and on the other hand relativism does not see the undoubted shared universalisms. In harmony with Kramsch (2004), a weak version of relativism prevails today since it seems obvious that:

- translation between two languages is possible even if the nuances of some meanings are lost.
- numerous multilingual individuals know their language in a de-ethnicized way, that is to say without being tied to a given community.

In practice, the weak version of relativism holds that only some more general mental categories are innate, but

that the actual form in which it is realized is the result of experience.

In other words, we can say that the link between language and thought exists but that language as a structure does not determine but influences our way of perceiving and categorizing the world.

However, this link still remains very unexplored in an empirical sense to understand how and how much language and thought interact.

Language and identity

We speak to reveal to others their identity intended as an answer to the question "Who am I?" My identity is who I am and answers the questions "Who are we?", "What personality do we have? Where do we come from? what job do we do? Which group do we belong to?" The importance of language can be seen as an expression of identity when, in a moment of waiting in an office, we hear people say "holy patience" or "porch Vaca" next to us. These are all verbal clues to decide who the unknown interlocutor in the social space is. In the Italian context, geographic identity (provenance), ethnic identity (for those who are not Italian), social identity (belonging to certain social groups), and contextual identity (we speak differently if we are in a meeting, at the bar or on the phone).

For Crystal (1997) it can be argued that basic identities are of two types "the individual idiosyncratic identity of the person and the collective identity shared by a group of individuals. Furthermore, it must always be remembered that identity is always cultural because identity does not label reality but the conventionality (always social) of reality. Identity is mistakenly thought of as something you have or is while according to Bourdieu (1982), it is always a way of doing because it is built by the speaker by speaking as he speaks. In addition, it should be borne in mind that identity is always multiple because we have many traits and we play many different roles in life.

And finally, we must remember that identity is always relative because others can think and attribute another identity that I do not share. All this must take place while always maintaining a singular and coherent individual identity from within to avoid forms of pathology (Joseph, 2004).

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