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Sociology, Communication



Carolina Granados Mrs. Brady AP Language and Literature 16 September 2012 Impact of Priorities on the Intersection of Language and Culture The impact of language on culture and culture on language are all essentially based on priorities. A priority can be described as a resource or activity that a culture gives specified attention to. Distinguishing the priorities of a culture can be easily done by taking a look at their language or at their culture. The priorities of cultures, such as that of the Normans, Eskimos, Italians or Asians, are food, everyday activities, and communicating. There are many types of priorities but one priority that is probably the most important to any culture is food. According to Bill Bryson in *The Mother Tongue*, "every language has areas in which it needs, for practical purposes, to be more expressive than others" (14). This means that the culture's priorities cause the language to be more expressive. For example, Italians have over 500 names for macaroni because pasta is their main priority, while Araucanian Indians of Chile have a variety of words for hunger because food is scarce thus not a top priority. As reported by Tanya Brady in her lecture, in 1066 A. D the Normans and the Anglo Saxons had different words for the food they ate. The Anglo Saxon's priority was the farm animals and to provide the French with food and so they named their food with words like sheep, cow and pig. On the other hand the Norman's priority was not the farm animal but the actual food on their table therefore they named their food with words like mutton, beef, and bacon. This matters because it shows that their priorities of their food are seen throughout the words in their language. In 1984, Winston was unfamiliar with "good" foods, like wine. In the book O'Brien says, "It's called wine" (Orwell 171). This means that Winston did

not know what it was called because it was not in his language since wine was something Winston never had, making it not a priority. Food is a simple priority that can be affected by the words we use to describe it. In *The Origins of Pleasure*, Paul Bloom argues that changing the word that describes the food can change what a person thinks they are eating thus bringing more pleasure. For example, changing the name of wines for a more luxurious and expensive name can cause adults to believe they are drinking the expensive stuff making the wine more enjoyable. This shows that the words that are chosen to describe something can affect priorities, like the adults with the wine. Priorities of any culture, like the Eskimos, circle around the everyday activities they do. According to Bill Bryson, Eskimos have fifty words for types of snow. This means that the snow is a large part of their life, making it a big part of their language. Bryson also states that Arabs have over 6,000 words for camels and camel equipment. Working with camels is an everyday thing for the Arabs making camels a priority to their culture. Brady makes it clear that the Normans focused everyday on matters of court, government, fashion, and high living, while the English peasants just continued to eat, drink, work and sleep. The difference in preferences of these two tiers, the French-speaking autocracy and the English-speaking peasantry, is seen throughout the words in their language. In 1984 George Orwell describes that Winston's priority was to work for the Inner Party. His everyday life did not consist of fun and interesting activities but consisted instead on things the Party wanted him to do. This was because his leader Big Brother was destroying words out of their vocabulary which limited what Winston and the rest of the people in Oceania could do. Orwell describes Winston's day by

saying, " He...hurried of to the Center, took part in the solemn foolery of a " discussion group, " played two games of table tennis... and sat for a half an hour through a lecture... " (109). This shows his activities were controlled and limited. Mark Pagel in *How Language Transformed Humanity* said, " You use your language to alter the settings inside someone else's brain to suit your interest, " and in fact that was what Big Brother was doing to them. Limiting a person's activities also limits their priorities. Malcolm Gladwell, in *Outliers*, states that Asian children tend to work harder in mathematics because it is an advantage in their culture. Their language constructed of remarkably brief number words, which allowed the children to memorize them faster. The difference means that Asian children learn to count much faster than American children. This difference matters because the advantage of the number words in their language made mathematics one of their culture's priorities. Communication is another priority of any culture around the world. Davis Sedaris in *Americans in Paris* portrays the priority of communication perfectly. Davis Sedaris could not communicate with the people in Paris because of his language, which narrowed down who he was able to talk to and what he was able to do. Sedaris's activities were around the people that made him happy and that he had ease understanding and communicating like the children at the theater. Sedaris's priority of communicating with others was affected by the language he had not yet mastered. Malcolm Gladwell observed that the kinds of errors that cause plane crashes are invariably errors of communication. In the Avianca crash Klotz, the pilot, was not able to communicate his problem effectively because he was using his own cultural language, speaking as a subordinate

would to a superior. To the Kennedy Airport air traffic controllers the mitigated speech from the pilot did not mean he was being deferential to a superior but instead it meant he didn't have a problem. According to George Orwell the Inner Party used Euphony to prevent people in Oceania to communicate. The purpose was so that their society would speak so easily, almost automatically, with no personal expression so that communicating would become harder. Stripping away the uniqueness of how the word was said made the ideas left behind not worth listening to, thus decreasing the communication between everyone. Orwell says, " There will be no love" (267). In Oceania the people did not have any individual relationships, or any bonds or any love because there was no communication. This means that the priority of communication with individuals, like friends and family was removed completely. This matters because again changing the language in any way can affect the priorities of any individual, like the priority of communication. Mark Pagel states, " Our modern world is communicating with its self and with each other. " This means that communication is a way for every culture to transfer goods, ideas and technologies. This is a way for parts of the world to put their priorities together changing the known language and culture. Priorities are a large factor of the intersection between language and culture. Priorities essentially distinguish the difference in cultures by pin pointing the focuses in every single culture. Priorities of cultures, such as the food they eat, the activities they conduct, and the way they communicate, affect what people correlate to the words they speak which in turn changes the language. Works Cited Brady, Tanya. " The History of English Language. " A. P. English Language and Composition. Tahquitz

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