

Interaction between language and culture

Sociology



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Introduction:

Studies of language have provided an interesting insight into the workings of culture and the individual within the framework. Three concepts will be examined to understand the interaction between language and culture in the context of transnational societies. These areas are i) social network theory; ii) the nature of transnational communities and the impact of language, and iii) Sapir-Whorfian Theory. This paper will provide an annotated bibliography of three articles; each will examine one of these key concepts.

Social Network Theory:

He (2010). The Heart of Heritage: Sociological Dimensions of Heritage Language Learning

He's article examines the effect of migration and language immersion on the heritage language (HL). The impact of the new social network and immersion in English and American culture has a negative effect on the HL (He, 2010). Resultantly, language attrition occurs with the HL, even when the person is an adult in a diaspora community. To understand why this is social networks theory has to be applied at the micro and macro level, to understand how culture and society affect language throughout a person's life (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004). The maintenance of HL is an important factor in diaspora communities (Byon, 2003). However, this cannot prevent change in the linguistic form, because the wider social networks of American English has an impact on the HL (He, 2008). This is recognized as a side-effect of culture mixing (Harris, 2006; Schupbach, 2008). Consequently, when immersion occurs then this language becomes dominant, which negatively affects the HL.

An illustration of this is the Brazilian Nikkei (Japanese that migrated to Brazil in the early 20th Century). The Nikkei has used their ties to find jobs in Japan, where it has been observed that cultural ties have allowed for assimilation (Knight, 2002). However, their HL has undergone a significant level of attrition, and pigeon Japanese has been created. The inference is that language can diminish, but this does not necessarily affect cultural ties. Language attrition is a by-product of language shift, which results from the contact/clash between languages (De Bot & Stoessel, 2002).

The study of He (2010) indicates attrition occurs in all learners of a second language when a person is immersed in the culture of the language. He's (2010) findings are supported. Fairclough (2001) argues the impact of the new culture and language, which requires some level of assimilation to function (Fairclough, 2001). Consequently, in a multicultural society, there can be a mixing of languages, language assimilation, and language attrition, which depends on the level of immersion (Giles, 1984). However, a high level of language assimilation/accommodation can affect the cultural psyche of the migrant. Resultantly, the migrant does not want to return to their homeland (Hojat et al, 2010).

First language attrition is commonly seen in large urban societies, due to language borrowing. Thus, a person will borrow from other languages and dialects, because it is acceptable within the 'new' society of linking cultures (Harris, 2006; Schupbach, 2008). Alternatively, there are also trends to preserve minority languages, such as Welsh through social networking (Honeycutt & Cunliffe, 2010).

Language learning has a broader effect than just language assimilation; rather there can be the preservation of the HL also (Honeycutt & Cunliffe, 2010). The problems of language attrition in Chinese Diasporas can be modified by creating a new social network, which is devoted to HL preservation (He, 2010). Thus, the article concludes that:

“ Heritage language learning [and maintenance] has the potential to transform all parties involved in the socialization process” (He, 2010, p. 78).

Thus, social networks’ effect on language and culture can be problematic for migrant communities, because as the person assimilates to the state’s language attrition occurs. This can be identified when living in large urban areas, such as London. First language skills are degraded and/or communities borrow from one another, which can be seen in the borrowing from West Indian communities. Using the same theory a diaspora community can be created, which is dedicated to HL maintenance, or even cultural utilization of traditional language usage.

Transnational Communities:

Haller & Landolt (2005). The Transnational Dimensions of Identity Formation: Adult Children of Immigrants in Miami:

Language is an integral part of the culture; however, the precise effect of language is debated. The link between language and the person’s development, according to some theorists, is significant (Haller & Landolt, 2005). The transnational community is an interesting phenomenon in the context of the language and culture mix. A transnational community is a migrant community that can live anywhere in the world, because of the strong ties to their homeland (Gammage et al. 2005, pp. 62). Thus, the <https://assignbuster.com/interaction-between-language-and-culture/>

diaspora community has a binding culture and nationality that transcends borders (Singer, 2004; Singer et al, 2001).

Alfonso, Kokot & Toloyan (2004) identify that the diaspora survives on a perceived “ transnational networks. Identifications with imagined homelands and nation-states, as well as de-territorialized cultures and origins are seen as central for the construction of the diasporic identities” (p. 73). The binding factors of the diaspora community are language, history, and culture (Walter, 2001; Cohen, 2008).

The study by Haller & Landolt (2008) explores the links between language, history, and culture within the diasporic community of migrant families in Miami. An important binding factor is a language, even in the youth. There is a level of attrition; however, communities want to retain a connection to the homeland. A central factor in this illusion is the HL. The retention of HL for American-born children of migrants is through creating a connection to the illusory homeland. The most effective method is taking the child to the homeland (Portes et al. 2002). This means the transnational can be attained through perpetuation of the diaspora myth. Resultantly, “ the relationships between the home and homeland, the existence of multiple homes, diverse home-making practices and the intersections of home, memory, identity, and belonging” (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p. 199) become a fundamental part of the diaspora community (i. e. at home away from home). Haller & Landolt (2008) identify that an effective method of maintaining the myth is through continual ties to the homeland, such as trips to the homeland.

The role of language plays a central role in the diaspora because it allows the migrant community to retain the HL. A diaspora community can also have strong ties to the language and culture of the resident state, in order to prevent marginalization (Wahlbeck, 2002). HL retention is an effective tool for basing the illusory tie to the homeland. Haller & Landolt (2008) identify that the dual ties (i. e. homeland and resident state) are central to the Cuban elite in Miami, which has empowered this Hispanic community through all echelons of the Miami culture.

In the West Indian community of London, cultural ties are especially important. The West Indian patois is retained with the close ties with home, which means that assimilating into English society does not require the patois to be lost, albeit is an English dialect. Thus, language assimilation does not prevent the retention of HL and culture, as long as a transnational identity is created upon the language tie.

Sapir-Whorfian Theory:

Zahedi (2008). Determinist Inquiries: Debates on the Foundation of Language

Zahedi explores the different models of language determinism, in order to show that limiting the analysis to just the Sapir- Whorfian Hypothesis is misplaced. His hypothesis may help to explain how law and social/cultural norms are developed, but it is not an exclusive form of determinism.

Sapir-Whorfian Theory is centered on language determinism. There are two forms of determinism that arise out of this theory, which is soft and hard linguistic determinism. The strong model “ is often called the prison house view of language – that is, the limits of language are the limits of the world”

(Mooney, 2010, p. 32). The soft model identifies language has some effect on the thought processes of the person. The latter model is more convincing. It provides that there is an inextricable link between language and the person, which will mean the adult in a transnational community, will be influenced by perceptions and values that stem from their culture and language (Lam et al, 2012). Determinists argue that thought processes are affected by language (Boroditsky 2001; Boroditsky, et al 2001, 2003, 2004). Nevertheless, this approach fails to recognize the fluidity of language, which is seen in the development of diaspora communities (Canagarajah, 2007; Haughen, 1972).

The perceptions and the ideology of the researcher influence their examination of language, its language links to culture and impact of the person (Zahedi, 2008). Hence, the best model of determinism is ascertained by the researcher's methodological approach. The empiricist is best suited to the Sapir- Whorfian Hypothesis because it focuses on linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism (Mooney, 2010).

The strong form that “ language determines thought” (Zahedi, 2008, p. 29) has been rejected. Instead, the viable form is the soft approach, which states language affects thought patterns (Bilik, 2002; Zahedi, 2008). This has been supported by a number of studies (Boroditsky 2001; Boroditsky, et al 2001, 2003, 2004). This is an anthropological approach to language (i. e. externalist approach). Thus, language develops in a flexibly, especially when different cultures clash (Bilik, 2002).

Culture clash will have two effects, the first is that the language will adapt to the new community (Collinge, 2002, p. 254; De Bot & Stoessel, 2002). Thus,

a broader understanding of language needs to be engaged with, such as the Saussurean approach. The Saussurean is an internalist approach, which identifies the arbitrariness of linguistic signs identified in the externalist framework (Zahedi, 2008, p. 25).

This article argues both the internalist and externalist approaches to language are necessary. Thus, Zahedi (2008) argues that just focusing on Sapir- Whorfian determinism will limit sociological understandings of language. A broader application of language and culture is essential, especially in the multicultural or transnational community (Safar, 2004). This is because clashes between cultures or resident state and HL preservation can change the perceptions of the person (Knight, 2002). The application to Multicultural London is interesting because the use of West Indian patios in other communities is clearly identifiable. It seems that this language has become part of the urban landscape. Thus, applying a narrow assimilative approach is not appropriate. Rather, a mixed approach to determinism is necessary, in order to understand how language affects the person and its connection to the social landscape (i. e. the link between West Indian patois and London's urban landscape. .

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