



“Self-Exploration for Becoming: Experience as an International Student”

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ABSTRACT

The relationship of language, culture, identity and difference is so complicated that it becomes almost impossible to understand one without understanding others. Mutual interdependence of language and culture has huge impact on worldview of a particular community. Since, systematic organizational language components have specific meanings to worldview. Being repeatedly or usually used by specific cultural members these meaning shapes world view of those specific cultural members. We may say that if two cultural communities speak two different languages, definitely, they would have different worldview from each other due to the difference in the languages they speak as every language has a specific culture and meaning of the language components (Spair-Whorf hypothesis, Kramsch, 1998).

Current study is an auto-ethnography of the researcher to comprehend the language, culture, identity, difference, their mutual relationship and representation. It is coupled with the reflection on a lived experience in Australia during Master of TESOL program based on the above discussed concepts. It is followed by the implication for teaching and learning and conclusion.

Introduction

Language, culture, identity, difference, their mutual relationship and representation are very significant to comprehend the complexities of the world-view of a person, group or society. So, it becomes very critical to be studied by the various individuals to develop a critical lens to analyze, understand day to day matters and act responsibly.

Purpose of the study

Current study is an auto-ethnography of the researcher to comprehend the language, culture, identity, difference, their mutual relationship and representation. It is coupled with the reflection on a lived experience in Australia during Master of TESOL program based on the above discussed concepts.

Research Method

It is an auto-ethnography of the researcher during his stay at Australia to complete Master of TESOL degree from a world-renowned University. An auto-ethnography Auto ethnography is the researcher's view point in which the researcher attempts to portray the mechanisms of the 'inner world' (Holt, 2003, p.5) of a person. The characteristics that makes an auto ethnography unique is that the researcher not only considered within the experience of the individual or group but he/she also get an opportunity to reflect upon and highlights own personal experience of the researched situation as well. An ethnography progresses from presenting 'self' into history and analysing it into present. During this the researcher relies on different methods for scripting and conveying his/her view point (Denzin, 2006; Holt, 2003). This method projects

'self' as other' and while dealing with culture, a balance is required for the researcher and their relevance to culture. For the sake of a genuine outcome, it reveals the unseen 'I' (Berry, 2011). The standards of methodological practices are usually challenged to serve the purpose of an auto ethnography which results in achieving an unrestricted representation of social structures, depicting the real existence of supremacy, freedom and favouritism (Denzin, 2006; Berry, 2011), in the study of elements which were signified as 'object', abnormal, exotic, and uncivilised", and to evaluate the descriptions of western white history writers (Spry, 2011, p.500).

Language, culture, identity, difference, their mutual relationship and representation

Language. Language has been explained from diverse perspectives to be understood. A belief as mentioned by "language games" that language is static which has fossilized the meanings in its' language resources for ever. Being so, these language resources could be utilized to communicate effectively in the society irrespective of the context of its' usage and its' users. In contrast, new sociolinguistics approach signifies a language's relativeness for its better understanding. It emphasizes that language resources are not sufficient enough for effective communication in a society until and unless a sophisticated comprehension of the context of resources' usage and its' users is made (Hall, & Kelly, 2013; Kramsch, 1998). In view of the fact that language resources have stored meaning in them due to the frequency of their usage and their institutionalization in a society and have become a standard to be used to communicate effectively regardless of the context and their users (single-voiced utterances Bakhtins, 1981 as cited in Hall, & Kelly, 2013). Here, it would be significant to mention that not all language

resources have attained this status. So, other language resources are dependent of their users and context as put forward by the notion of “emergent grammar”.

Owing to the fact that language resources’ user on one hand comprehends the historical meanings of these language resources and possess past experiences of using these language resources. On the other hand, a particular context, language user is dealing with and, person, whom s/he is communicating with may affect the use of language resources’ usage pattern of language. For example, a language user may (passive double-voiced utterance, Bakhtins, 1981 as cited in Hall, & Kelly, 2013) or may not (active double-voiced utterances, Bakhtins, 1981 as cited in Hall, & Kelly, 2013) use language resources with respect to their historical meanings. It means language user may also put his/her own voice in the conventional meanings of language resources. Then, it would be significant to mention that meanings of language resources neither rely on their historical usage nor on their usage at present by an individual. In fact, language resources’ meanings are constructed through the interaction between past and present and individual and society through dialogue. Thus, while analyzing language usage in a particular situation with reference to their historical meaning we develop new ways to create our voices to respond political and social pressures (Coulter, & Jimenez-Silva, 2017; Hall, & Kelly, 2013; Kramsch, 1998).

Culture. “linguistics applied” traditional concept of culture depicts it as a static body of knowledge possessed by its members in homogeneity. Culture stands alone with an abstract system to accumulate, organize and represent knowledge. It has nothing to do with language. Language is incapable to influence culture in any way. While, sociolinguistic concept is of the view that culture is dynamic, fluid and developing. It inhabits in language resources’ meanings which have gathered these meanings during their continuous past usage and which we

utilize as a tool to communicate in different situations. Being members of diverse communities, we are continuously negotiating our cultural identities through communication which is mostly done by language resources.

Using language, we not only interpret our own world, but we also try to convince others to comprehend and deal with us in these certain ways. Doing so, we develop and maintain specific nature of relationships with others and creating some pertinent traces which are different from other cultures. It highlights that language on one hand is accumulations of cultural values and beliefs and on the other hand language shapes culture through the process of meaning making, through dialogue taking into account that communication is done through language between community members in specific contexts at particular times. We cannot separate culture from language as they are mutually dependent as culture concentrates on activities and study of language means study of culture.

Here, it would be significant to mention that cultures are influenced by the powerful members of the community as they have the power to decide which etiquettes or values, belief or historical event would be appropriate or inappropriate but at the same time culture is also influenced by other powerful cultures of the world. As powerful cultures may represent a specific culture in a specific way. Culture is represented by language and signs (Hall, & Kelly, 2013; Kramsch, 1998).

Difference. Difference portrays dissimilarity or disagreement among concepts, cultures, languages, identities and so on. In doing so, it becomes key to shape identity of individuals, societies, cultures and languages. In fact, every culture or language possess a classification system or “faciality machine” which serves to include or exclude people in that language or culture. This classification system or “faciality machine” is based on concepts, signs or symbol used and history.

Concepts include worldview in terms of ethnicity, race, social status, education, intelligence, IQ and so on. Similarly, signs or symbol include flag, dresses, drinks, food, national animal and so forth. Based on these concepts and signs or symbols people are accepted as cultural/community members or excluded as “other”.

Most interestingly, concepts of a particular cultural groups also keep on changing due to the changing internal and external political, economic, social, religious situations with passage of time. In the same way, concepts and beliefs of a person of a culture and language also change with respect to his/her life experiences. So, we may say that there is a change in the formation and application of “classification system” or “faciality machine” which demonstrates that difference is also varying (Bright, 2017; Woodward, 1997; Murdock, 2016).

Identity. Identity/identities is used to present oneself. We possess multiple identities which are divided into two aspects. Essentialist and non-essentialist. Essentialist refers to fixed identities and non-essentialist denotes changing identity. Basically, identity is the product of culture and representation through language as we develop some concepts about ourselves in terms of race, ethnicity, historical events, signs, symbols and so on. So, it is considered static but in reality, it is ever changing. Every day, we negotiate our identity/ies in our attempts to respond to social, political, cultural and media pressures, essentialist representation of past events and using specific signs or symbols. So, identity is not being but becoming. Identity is not always as one claims to be but sometimes it is assigned through system of representation. Moreover, it is relational as a culture has “classification system” or “faciality machine” based on concepts and signs or symbols to include the people who have same concepts or use same signs or symbols as a cultural member or vice versa (Bright, 2017; Woodward, 1997; Murdock, 2016).

Representation. The purpose to discuss representation here is to understand its key role in shaping language, culture, identity and difference. Representation is to give meanings to something which is being represented through language. Sometimes, it is not necessary that a language, culture or an identity is being represented the way it really is. It might include distortion due to the political, social, religious, economic, racial reasons and so on. Events, objects or people are represented through correlation with some mental representations. Intangible concepts like honesty, death, fortune and so on are also represented through language. It illustrates that a culture through language assigns meaning to events, objects and people. Definitely, they may change from time to time and culture to culture (Hall, 2013). Each language has its own coding and decoding system. Using this system cultural members use language to send message and receiver interpret it to comprehend the message in that language. But due to different life experiences, different cultural members may decode same message in different ways (Lee, 2015, January 18). Power also plays significant role in representation. For example, powerful cultural members may decide the appropriate and inappropriate events, etiquettes, symbols and so on for a culture and weak members of the culture have no choice other than accepting it. In the same manner, powerful culture in the world could also represent other culture, the way it wants. We might say they could engineer the weak culture through representation (Coulter, & Jimenez-Silva, 2017; Hall, 2013).

Mutual relationship. The relationship of language, culture, identity and difference is so complicated that it becomes almost impossible to understand one without understanding others as it is obvious during my struggle to explain them separately while refereeing others.

Mutual interdependence of language and culture has huge impact on worldview of a

particular community. Since, systematic organizational language components have specific meanings to worldview. Being repeatedly or usually used by specific cultural members these meaning shapes world view of those specific cultural members. We may say that if two cultural communities speak two different languages, definitely, they would have different worldview from each other due to the difference in the languages they speak as every language has a specific culture and meaning of the language components (Spair-Whorf hypothesis, Kramsch, 1998). This relation could also be seen in Universal grammar theory verses “socially constituted” linguistics where innate ability to learn and speak language irrespective of context is being analyzed due to the fact that we use language in different contexts in particular times. Thus, we need understanding of use of different language utterances according to situation and time which demands defining language from sociocultural perspective.

Another dimension to understand the complexity of language and culture is to look into language resources originating from social interaction among cultural members. Research methods have been used to classify the diversity through research such as “ethnography of speaking”, “ethnography of communication” methods and to analyze conversation “conversation analysis” which highlighted that speech and language are similar across a culture but different across cultures, so they may influence cross cultural understanding of a phenomenon belonging to same language but different cultures. Because, language we learn is subject to our life experiences which navigate our thinking during speaking. Most significantly, dealing with language as a system leads to better understanding of not only language but for language teaching as well. “Systematic functional linguistic” theory emphasizes to comprehend the relationship among language functions, they represent and their contextual usage to uncover meanings of language forms. We may say that language is influenced by the culture and culture is influenced by language

usage of community members (Hall, & Kelly, 2013; Kramsch, 1998).

In the same manner language and culture acquire/assign identities to individuals which are based on differences from other cultures and languages. Even identities could influence language and culture and differences among groups. Language, culture, identities and differences are changing due to different life experiences of individuals, internal and external cultural, political, religious, economic and media forces through representation. (Hall, & Kelly, 2013; Kramsch, 1998).

Event

The incident I am going to quote in next few lines, took place in the first week of our arrival in Australia. Those were the days when we (me and my wife) were keenly looking for some suitable property for renting. On one sunny morning when I along with my wife and nine months daughter was going back towards our temporary residence after a property inspection. While walking down the road I saw a middle aged, white lady standing beside the road, struggling with her travel trolley and trying to adjust her luggage in it. It seemed to me that she needed support to place her luggage properly in the trolley. I drew my wife’s attention to her and asked the lady “do you need help?” In response she nodded her head, as she wanted us to help her out. My wife began to approach her but unexpectedly, that lady started yelling at us hysterically. She shouted at us by abusing and said, ‘Do not come near me, I do not need your help...., stay away from me... I can manage it by myself. Stay away from us and stay away from Aussie children. You are spoiling us...’ Meanwhile, she managed to adjust her baggage in her trolley and walked away. We both were astonished due to her misbehave. We stood there for a minute and then moved on our way back to home thinking and discussing together “what wrong we did with her”.

Analysis

This incident has been analyzed from the perspective of language, culture, identity, difference and their complex inter-relationship. Moreover, analysis highlighted the significance of change in language, culture, identity and difference with respect to time and context.

We both (me and my wife) have our own mother languages i.e. Punjabi and Urdu respectively. Each language has its' own linguistic features, functions and social evolution (Solé, Murtra, Valverde, & Steels, 2010). Possessing these specific linguistic features functions and social evolution each language influences its' native speaker's second language learning process (Jaskulska, & Łockiewicz, 2017). It is obvious in our case. For example, I have different accent of English language as compared to my wife's English language accent. In the same way, our (me and my wife's) accent of English language is different from native English language speakers (Bright, 2017; Kramersch, 1998). In fact, our accent is termed as "non-native accent" (Bright, 2017).

In the same way, having different mother languages and different contexts in a country, we have different cultures but belonging to a country Pakistan, we have a common culture, a Pakistani culture. The notion of national identity where we compromised few differences and promoted sameness, is quite visible here. We have some dos and don'ts in Pakistani culture like other cultures as culture imposes some obligations to its' member (Kramersch, 1998).

Similarly, we possess multiple identities, Pakistani, Muslim, educationists, adult, married, brown and so forth (Bright, 2017). It highlights that identities are subject to time and context. My wife wears hijab as a religious obligation (Eid, 2014). This reminded me the shared values and beliefs, a cultural group develops through social interactions with the passage of time

(Kramersch, 1998). In the same way, a cultural group assigns specific meanings to a certain object, people or event because for us, hijab is a normal religious practice which is respected in the society and it has nothing to do with terrorism (Eid, 2014). In the same manner, in Pakistani culture helping and respecting women is considered a responsibility of men. Simultaneously, our (non-native) accent was fine in our context (Pakistan) as all of us almost have the same (non-native) accent. On the same topic, in Pakistan, almost all people are brown, and it has no relationship with racism (Woodward, 1997).

Additionally, concepts and signs which are held by one culture differ in other cultures (Kramersch, 1998; Woodward, 1997). The same, we experienced during this incident as that white lady had her own beliefs and values. In other words, she had her own "classification system" or "faciality machine". Once she applied "faciality machine" using "white wall/black hole system" on us, "faciality machine" rejected us on being different (Bright, 2017) (women wearing hijab, non-native accent, brown, offering help).

It might be a possibility that she was of the view that white skin people are superiors, and all those who are not white (black or brown) are others, inferiors. Moreover, she could have developed a concept that having a native English accent is standard and acceptable and having non-native accent is inappropriate and unacceptable. In the same way, wearing hijab could have seem to her threatening because it was something which was not common practice in her (Australian) culture (Eid, 2014). Most probably, she could have connected it with terrorism that people who wear hijab are serious threat. In conjunction, she might also have felt that our presence in this country (Australia) would have negative influence on Australian culture as we were others in her culture. Simultaneously, she realized that our interaction with Australian children would lead to spoil them as we have different culture

which is bad and Australian culture is good (Bright, 2017; Kramsch, 1998).

Definitely, she took difference negative like most of the people do in their lives. As once she realized that we are others who might be potential threat to her, and her culture, she used her whole power to show her hate and anger as much as she could. Perhaps, taking any physical action was beyond her power. This reminded me the role of representation using power of electronic and print media and other resources like films, advertisement, political campaigns and so on. The ways through which representation could distort language, culture and identity. Power to assign new identities to individuals, cultural groups and to non-native speakers where powerful culture has the authority to impose identity on other cultures and powerless cultures have to accept it (Eid, 2014; Hall, 2013).

But this was not only the representation behind her behavior, I think personal previous life experiences of individuals also play vital role to shape individual's particular behavior towards people who are different from them. Since we know that concept or behavior of one person could not express the concept or behavior of entire cultural group. This white lady was also depicting her own behavior (towards a possible threat) which is not reflected in the Australian culture (Bright, 2017; Hall, & Kelly, 2013). A culture which embraces and appreciates diversity (Odn, 2017, August 17) where diversity is seen as strength and which welcomes immigrants (Murdock, 2016). Still her strange response was reflection of the power of representation and her own concepts.

In the same manner, we were not expecting such response from that white lady. So, we stood speechless. Perhaps, we were not ready for such culture shock which people experience when they interact with people of different culture group. In Pakistani culture, people from other cultures are not treated like this, the way that lady treated us. It expresses

the diversity in concepts, beliefs, responses from culture to culture, from person to person either they are from the same culture or from different cultures (Kramsch, 1998).

This entire event made me realize the complexity and significance of the relationship among language, culture, identity, difference and power of representation as a person and as an educationist. Language, culture, identity and difference are bound to time and context and interchangeable. This has implications for learning and teaching (Michelson, 2018).

Conclusion

Interplay of language, culture, identity and difference have significance in learning and teaching including English language. A world where English is no more belongs to only English people, instead it has been treated as "language of intercultural communication" (Crowther, & Costa, 2017). It becomes need of time for educators to fully understand the complex relationship of language, culture, identity, difference along with the critical role of representation through power. On one hand, it would facilitate teachers to critically reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs apropos English Language learning but English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy/andragogy as well. Doing so, ELT teachers/educators would be in a better position to understand their position in terms of identity, culture, language and difference based on their life experiences. Being reflexive, they would in a better position to devise appropriate ELT pedagogy/andragogy to meet their learners' individuality and complexity. Considerably, when difference is treated as negative. ELT teachers/educators could influence not only themselves but learners as well through reflection and being reflexive to celebrate diversity to make world a better living place for all

(Morgan, 2007; Murdock, 2016). It could be done through innovative steps by embracing amalgamation of language, culture (Michelson, 2018) and identity in learning and teaching (Coulter, & Jimenez-Silva, 2017).

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