Introduction to Language and Culture

BBI 3310 (Unit 1-8/8)
Program Bachelor

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MODUL PEMBELAJARAN : BHI 3310 INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
disediakan dalam bentuk bahan pengajaran dan pembelajaran kendiri di bawah program Pendidikan
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Preface

Introduction to the course/module

The course provides an introduction to the ways in which language and culture reflect each other. It also aims to introduce arenas in which language and culture are linked. We will examine how language structures thought; how people talk as a means of accomplishing their goals; and investigate connections between language and social structures.

Aims of the course

By the end of this course, you should be able to understand the fundamental concepts used in the study of language and culture. You should also be able to discuss the notions of language and cultures and how they are related or interconnected to one another.

Synopsis

The course will examine the relationship of language and culture. In particular, it examines how meaning is related to sign and action. Additionally, it investigates the spoken language and oral culture; the print language and literate culture; as well as the relationship between language and cultural identity. It will also discuss some current issues in relation to language and culture.
Learning schedule

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UNIT 1: Introduction to Language and Culture

What is Language?

There are numerous definitions of language but for our purposes, we shall look at the definition offered by Fromkin and Rodman (1998: 4):

It is said that when you know a language, you can speak and be understood by others who know that language. In other words, you can produce sounds that signify certain meanings and you can understand or interpret the sounds produced by others. Thus, knowledge of a language includes knowing ‘the sound system, words, and the sentences or non-sentences of that language’ (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998: 4). We often use the terms *linguistic competence* and *linguistic performance* to refer to knowledge of a language.

Task 1 (20 minutes)

Find out the definitions of *linguistic competence* and *linguistic performance*. For this activity, it is useful to read Fromkin and Rodman (1998: 3 – 13).

Functions of Language

When we refer to language, we do not refer to the competence and performance aspects only. Very often we forget the aspect of what it is used for. Thus another definition of language is offered here:
We can speak of European culture although there is variation in dress, language, child-rearing practices, and religious beliefs among the people. At the same time, we speak of a Portuguese culture and a Brazilian culture although the people of these two groups speak essentially the same language. So there is no universally acceptable definition of the term \textit{culture}. However, there has been a trend to give attention to some range of social phenomena that appears important. Among the sociological factors are language, urbanization, formal educational institutions, and literacy (Cole and Scribner, 1974: 7).

Hence, culture is a deep, multi-layered and cohesive combination of language, values, beliefs, and behaviours that pervades every person’s life, and is continually undergoing minor and occasionally major alterations. It is shared and it exists only in relation to a specific social grouping. It has to be acquired and created by human beings only as members of society. Therefore, as groups constantly maintain some aspects of their identity while periodically modifying other aspects, individuals serve the dual function of being culture bearers as well as culture makers.

In other words, culture is learned. The process through which culture is learned and acquired is referred to by anthropologists as \textit{enculturation} (Rosman and Rubel, 1995: 6). It is not carried in the genes. A newborn child comes equipped with virtually no cultural baggage. An essential characteristic of ‘being human’ is the manner consciously and unconsciously, in which we transmit cultural patterns to succeeding generations.

Thus, culture is defined as ‘the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and
These auxiliary communication techniques are known as **paralanguage**. They are redundant but they contribute to effective communication. The paralanguage messages that can be observed through face to face contact makes it more difficult to lie or hide emotions. It has been suggested that at least 60% of what we communicate when talking directly with others is through paralanguage. The various forms of paralanguage include **kinesics, tone and character of voice, and proxemics** (O’Neil, 2000).

**a. Kinesics**

Kinesics is body language, that is the language of gestures, expressions and postures. In Malaysia, for example, we use our arms and hands to say good-bye, count, express excitement, beckon, threaten, etc. There are many subtle variations of each of these gestures, each used in a different context or situation. We use our head to say yes or no, and our face to smile, and frown. We may shrug with our head and shoulders to show that we do not know something.

**b. Gestures**

Some gestures are the same throughout the world. One such gesture is a smile. Some gestures may be different in different parts of the world. For instance, spitting on someone is a symbol or sign of contempt in Malaysia but it is an affectionate blessing if done in a certain way among the Masai of Kenya (O’Neil, 2000).
feels threatened by what may be perceived as hostile or threatening overtures. As a result, the verbal message may not be listened to or understood as it was intended. People of Hispanic origin tend to be closer in distance when talking about personal topics compared to Malaysians. In some societies, people avoid eye contact in a crowd. An example is the Japanese.

Culture also tells us when and how it is acceptable to touch other individuals. In the Malaysian society, hand-holding to show close friendship among females, and sometimes even among males, is not uncommon. In Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America, physical contact is also expected and desired. However, in North America and Northern Europe, culture discourages touching by adults except in moments of intimacy or formal greeting such as hand-shaking or hugging. This is especially true with men. If they hold hands or kiss in public, they might not be looked upon favourably.

Use of Space

Culture tells us how to organise space in such a way as to control the nature of interaction. In Malaysian corporate offices, for example, the manager is usually isolated in a separate and private room. This minimises his/her personal contact with the workers. On the other hand, Japanese offices are set up with the manager’s desk at the end of a row of desks used by subordinate employees. This maximises his interaction with the workers.

Culture also guides our perception of space by defining units of it. For example, our properties are divided into segments of space.
People in all cultures use clothing and other forms of bodily adornment to communicate status, intentions, and other messages. For instance, in Malaysia, only royalty can wear certain colours and usually this is done on formal occasions. In the west, for example in the UK, women dress differently for different occasions. For a business appointment or to go to work, they usually dress in suits or more sombre clothing – to project the image of sexual neutrality. However, they may dress in more revealing clothing when they go clubbing or out for dinner with a member of the opposite sex. In this instance, they want to be seductive or alluring.

The appearance of a person tells us their gender, age, economic class and sometimes their intentions. We recognise these cultural clues from an early age. The vocabulary of dress that we learn includes items of clothing, hair-styles, jewellery, makeup, and other body decoration. In most cultures, however, the same style of dress communicates different messages depending on the age, gender, and physical appearance of the individual wearing it.

Putting on certain types of clothing can change your behaviour and the behaviour of others towards you. This is the case with a military uniform, the white coat of a doctor, or a clown’s costume. Uniforms are symbolic and they can communicate status. The medals on a soldier’s uniform can tell even a stranger about his or her status, authority and military experience. Other forms of body decoration include body paint, hair paint, tattoos, decorative scaring and branding, perfumes, and body deformation.

Some cultures bind children’s heads and feet. The result is elongated heads and tiny feet. The latter was practised among the Chinese in China with their female offspring. The tinier a girl’s feet, the more desirable she is in the eyes of her suitors. Fortunately, this practice has been discontinued. Holes in ears for
Task 5 (10 minutes)

When travelling to other societies, it is important to understand that there are likely to be significant gender differences in paralanguage. Discuss this briefly in relation to the Malaysian context.

Summary

In this unit, we have looked some definitions of language and how it is used in communication. We have also looked how culture is defined. Finally, we looked at other forms of communication since the human communication process is rather complex. We have seen that a lot of our messages in face-to-face contact are transmitted through paralanguage. These auxiliary communication techniques are culture bound in more ways that one. Communication with people from other societies or ethnic groups is fraught with the danger of misunderstanding if their culture and paralanguage is unknown or ignored.
UNIT 2: The Relationship of Language and Culture

Language and Culture

When language is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture (Kramsch, 1998:3). Kramsch puts forth three points to express the relationship between language and culture (p. 3 of your text). They are:

1. Language expresses cultural reality.
2. Language embodies cultural reality.
3. Language symbolises cultural reality.

Task 1 (20 minutes)

Read page 3 of your text and briefly explain each of the above aspects.

Now read the poem by Emily Dickinson on page 4 and the subtopic of nature, culture, language.

In Unit 1, we have looked at how culture may be defined. In your text, culture is defined as 'what has been grown and groomed' (from the Latin word colere: to cultivate) (Kramsch, 1998: 4). This is contrasted with nature which refers to 'what is born and grows organically (from the Latin word nascere: to be born) (Ibid.). The poem expresses the relationship of nature, culture and language. Both nature and culture are likened to gifts but of different types. Nature is bound by biological time but culture is not. It is said that both nature and culture need each other. Closely bound to the two is language. Culture imposes a value on
a social group to the extent that each member can identify with the manner it remembers its past, turn its attention to the present, and anticipates its future (Kramsch, 1998: 7). This is a diachronic view of culture. These two layers of culture collectively, have been termed the sociocultural context of language study.

The third layer to culture is the imagination. This aspect is mediated through language and is a metaphor for cultural reality (Kramsch, p. 8). For example, KLCC is now closely linked to the city of Kuala Lumpur in the cultural imagination of the people working and living there. Similarly, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York were closely linked to the city in the imagination of its inhabitants, that is, until disaster struck on 12 September 2001.

Task 3 (20 minutes)

From the social, the historic, and the imagined dimensions, culture is said to be heterogeneous and constantly changing. What do you understand by this?

In summary, Kramsch (1998) defines culture as ‘membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings’ (p. 10).
visitor. The assumption made is that, there is an objective reality and this is more important than cultural perceptions of it. In contrast, emic categories involve a classification according to the way in which members of a society classify their own world. This approach tells us little about the objective reality but it is useful and insightful in understanding how other people perceive that reality through the filter of their language and culture. This discussion brings us to the next subtopic: 

language and thought processes.

Language and Thought Processes

As we have seen thus far, language is not only a means of communication for us. It also influences our culture and our thought processes to a certain extent. It was thought that language actually shapes our perception of reality. This was due mainly to Sapir and Whorf who said that language predetermines what we see in the world around us. In other words, we see the real world only in the categories of our language.

The Whorfian Hypothesis

Benjamin Whorf, an authority on native American languages, proposes that language is not a way of expressing or packaging thought. He maintained that it is a mould that shapes our thoughts. The world can be perceived and structured in many ways, and the language we have acquired directs the particular way we see and structure it. This view, which for many years was influential in the social sciences, is forcefully stated in the following passage by Whorf (1956: 212 – 214; in Cole and Scribner, 1974: 40 –41):

It was found that the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing
Strong versions of linguistic relativity and determinism have serious implications for man's study of himself, as well as for his study of nature. By adhering to such extreme forms of the proposition would mean closing the door to objective knowledge. If the environment and what it comprises are known only through the varying selective and organising mechanisms of language, what we perceive and experience would then be arbitrary. It is not necessarily related to what is out there but only to how our particular language community has agreed to talk about what is out there. Our explorations of the world and beyond would be restricted to the features coded by our language, and exchange of knowledge across cultures would be limited or impossible.

However, the evidence related to the hypothesis indicates that language is a less powerful factor in its constraints on perception and thought than Whorf believed it to be. It is most convenient to review the evidence in terms of the different aspects of language that Whorf thought might influence cognition. The first is the way in which individual units of meaning slice up the nonlinguistic world (the vocabulary or lexicon of a language). The second aspect relates to the rules for combining basic units of meaning (the grammar of a language). Whorf also suggested that these aspects of language were related both to other cultural characteristics (such as cultural attitudes towards time, quantification) and to individual characteristics (the individual’s perception and thought).

The notion of linguistic relativity implies that the world is differently experienced in different language communities and more strongly, that language causes these differences. The latter claim is too strong and we will disregard it. Moreover, to determine whether language or thought is the prior or more basic cognitive capacity, we would have to investigate how changes in either class of operations (linguistic or conceptual) affect the other. However, the cross-cultural data gathered thus far on the Whorfian hypothesis are correlational in nature – that is,
other ways of dividing up the spectrum of visible light. However, as cultural and technological changes occur with a society, the number of colour terms usually also increases (Wardhaugh, 1996: 231). That is to say, the colour spectrum gets subdivided into more categories. As the environment changes, culture and language typically respond by creating new terminology to describe it.

With regard to terms used for things around us, they reflect a particular culture’s interests and concerns. For instance, natives in the Northwest Territories of Canada have thirteen terms for different types of snow (for example, *flying snow*, *slushy snow*, *dry snow*, etc.), while Malaysians use only one term – snow. The number of terms related to a particular topic also may be greater or smaller depending on such social factors as gender. For example, North American women generally make more colour distinctions than do men. This may be largely due to the fact that subtle colour differences are important factors in women’s clothing and makeup. Parents and peers encourage and train girls early to be knowledgeable about these distinctions.

What is the significance of such lexical differences? Does the fact that a language does not have separate terms for certain phenomena mean that the users of this language are unable to distinguish these phenomena from others? Are Malaysians unable to see the differences that the natives of Canada see in snow?

Certain aspects of language behaviour challenge Whorf’s proposal that the absence or presence of a lexical distinction can be taken as an indicator of a corresponding perceptual or conceptual distinction. While it may not be possible to translate one language into another with term-for-term correspondence, the preservation and expression of at least some part of the original meaning argues against any hard-and-fast identification of word categories with thought categories. Nor is language interchangeability a skill confined to trained linguists;
Summary

In this unit, we saw how language is intimately related to culture. We also looked at how culture constrains us at the social, historical and metaphorical levels. The notion of language relativity as proposed by Whorf was also discussed. The conclusion that we have reached is that the weak version (but not the strong version) of the proposal may be accepted.
Task 4
Suggested answers

1. Culture is the result of human intervention in the biological processes of nature.
2. Culture both liberates and constrains
3. Culture is the product of socially and historically situated discourse communities.
4. A community’s language and its material achievements represent a social patrimony and a symbolic capital.
5. Cultures are a constant site of struggle for recognition and legitimation.

Task 5
Suggested answers

The first states that the world is differently experienced and conceived in different communities. This proposition has come to be known as linguistic relativity.

The second proposition goes beyond the simple statement that there are differences in cognition associated with differences in language to claim that language actually causes these differences. This is the doctrine of linguistic determinism and it is essentially a conception of a one-way causal sequence among cognitive processes with language playing the directing role.

Task 6
Suggested answers

This answer will depend on the language that you speak.

According to Berlin (1969, in Wardhaugh, 1996: 230), if a language has only two terms for basic colours, they are the equivalent for black and white. If a third is needed, the colour is red. The fourth and fifth terms are yellow and green while the sixth and seventh are blue and brown. Finally, as in English, some terms like grey, pink, orange, and purple.
UNIT 3: Meaning as Sign

Introduction

What does it mean to mean something?

Meaning is related to social reality. There is meaning at word level and there
is meaning at discourse level. However, the relationship between form and
meaning is arbitrary. There is no reason why a car is called a car. The
linguistic sign on its own does not convey meaning. Meaning is often
manifested through denotations, connotations and icons. There is in effect an
infinite variety of representations of meaning. Think of the following:

- A red flashing light
- An ambulance’s siren
- The word water
- The phrase: He is an extra mouth to feed

What do you see or hear in your mind? What we see or hear is a result of our
imposition of social reality. We make associations with the code as we
encode. The following sections will discuss some aspects of meaning as a
cultural phenomenon.

Denotations

Words and their denotations are found in dictionaries. They give the literal
meaning of the words used in a society. When words are strung together, it
gives rise to another level of meaning. As Bolinger and Sears (1981) say,
‘[t]he problem of meaning, then, is one of fitting together the partially fixed
semantic entities that we carry in our heads, tied to the word and forms of
sentences, to approximate the way reality is fitted together as it comes to us
Connotations

In addition to denotations, words also connotate meanings. Connotations are derived from how people use the words and the associations. It goes beyond literal meaning. As Meyer (1987) defines it, 'connotations derive their resonance from a person’s experiences with a word. Those experiences may not always be the same, especially when the people having them are in different times and places.' An example is the word theater. In ancient times, it was associated with disease, sin and depravity – all negative in nature. Today, it connotes high culture. As such, it is important for us to realise the changes in meanings in time and space.

Exposure to cultural associations develop the sensitivity to connotative meaning. Often words are used figuratively to enrich our expressions. In our everyday use of the language and in creative language use, we may resort to similes, metaphors and proverbs to portray our meaning. How many of these figures of speech are you familiar with? Fill in the blanks to test yourself.

a. Similes
As _____ as a peacock.
As _____ as a church mouse.
As _____ as a doll.
He eats like a _____ (a person with a small appetite)
He roars like a ____. (roaring very loudly)
He sleeps like a ____. (sleeping soundly)
**Encodings**

As mentioned earlier, meaning is situated in experience. And experience is culture-bound. Learning English is fraught with problems for the ESL learner, in part due to the cultural allusions that are in the language. We need to encode and bring to bear knowledge of semantic networks, discourse communities and practices.

**Semantic Networks**

Some semantic properties are those related to class of words, and their relationships. For example, we know that *woman, girl, lady* belong to the same word class. We also know that they share a common property of ‘femaleness’. Even if we were to come across alien words like *wopful* in ‘The grass is *wopful*’, we are able to deduce that *wopful* describes the grass as we are able to make the connection in the semantic relationship. Other associations with grass could be with the colour ‘green’ just as water is wet and summer is hot.

Words are also related to one another in a number of other ways. Some words are synonyms while others are antonyms.
Standard English

He is nice.
I’m going to do it.
He’s as nice as he says he’s.
Are you generally tired?
John is always happy.

African American English

He nice.
I gonna do it.
He as nice as he say he.
Do you be tired?
John be happy.


Dialects refer to language varieties which characterise different regional groups or social groups. In Malaysia, it is well known that we have dialectal differences between the northern, southern and the central regions. It is not surprising for a person from Kuala Lumpur, especially if he is non-native, not to understand fully what is said in Malay when he visits Kelantan. Language varieties could also be traced across countries. American English and British English could have differing lexical items to refer to the same entity.

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**Task 2** (10 minutes)

Are you able to give the British equivalent to the items in the list below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American</th>
<th>British</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>highway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cookies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hood (of a car)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flashlight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Contractions per Thousand Words of British English in Different Situations of Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation of Use</th>
<th>Contractions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone conversation with friends</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone conversation with strangers</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasts</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic fiction</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous speeches</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared speeches</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fiction</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic journals</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office documents</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, depending on the level of formality, the frequency of the contracted use differs.

As for variations in syntactic markers, legalese – language used in law is a case in point

To quote the example used by Finegan:

*Upon request of Borrower, Lender, at Lender’s option prior to full reconveyance of the Property by Trustee to Borrower, may make Future Advances to Borrower. Such Future Advances, with interest thereon, shall be secured by this Deed of Trust when evidence by promissory notes stating that said notes are secured hereby.*

What are some of the syntactic markers that define this discourse? You would probably notice the use of the passive, lack of pronouns, (specific nouns are preferred) and the avoidance of articles.

In the passage, the register *notes* has a specific meaning to refer to something of monetary value. This is an instance of semantic markers.
Summary

In this unit, a number of concepts have been introduced or reinforced. We talked about language as having linguistic signs which need interpretation in the social reality that they operate in. We explored levels of meanings which range from literal to non-literal and which includes the notion of iconicity. Finally, the process of encoding is related to other variables such as semantic field, discourse communities and practices. Varieties of language use and situations of use are part and parcel of dynamic cultural changes. While they are constraints in its realisation there is also the freedom to invent given the human diversity and imagination.
employee-employer belongs to the same word class
liquid – ice share similar semantic properties
smile – happiness share similar semantic properties
organ-stomach has the relationship of a classification with a sub classification
curriculum – geography has the relationship of a classification with a sub classification
moist – damp are synonyms

Task 4
Answers to American and British English

motorway
petrol
tin
biscuits
bonnet
torchlight
telly
UNIT 4: Meaning as Action

Introduction

In dealing with meaning as action, the study of language moves again away from the Chomskyian abstraction of language which is devoid of everyday contexts. The social approach adopted in the study of meaning as action must be added to the study of language if there is to be an encompassing theory of human language. This social approach anchors on what can be said in a language and leads on to cover questions like by whom, to whom, when, where, in what manner and, under what kind of social situations. This brings to mind Hymes' (1971) differentiation between linguistic competence and communicative competence. He even suggested that 'a child who might produce any sentence whatever without due regard to the social and linguistic context would be a social monster' (Mesthrie et al., 2000). Thus as Kramsch (1998) proposes that it is not enough just to understand words but more to it, there must be a context of situation when words are used and meaningful interaction should also relate to a larger context of culture.

Context of Situation

Within a community, different patterns of speaking are evident depending on contexts. For example, there would be differences between speakers according to status, like that of children and adults, superior and subordinates, difference in sexes, and occupations.

Finegan (1994:334) illustrates this point aptly by providing three scenarios in which a similar sentence is uttered in each instance.
Task 1  (10 minutes)

The replies to the three situations will vary according to the interpretation of the signs that accompanied the linguistic messages. What could be the replies to ‘I didn’t see the stop sign’ in the three situations?

Context of Situation and Context of Culture

The context of situation often cannot be divorced from the context of culture. Culture, just like situation, provides an added dimension to the speech environment. Behaviour which is culturally linked accompanies the interpretation of signs manifested through language. This encompasses structures of expectations which are culled from experience of the world. Through such exposure, the experiences are stored in the mind and called into play when contact that is made activates an appropriate response. The stored knowledge is termed as frames or schemata. Thus, in each of us, there is a myriad of frames, for example, at a dinner party, attending a job interview, listening to a lecture and many others.

Together with verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal signs (contextualization cues), interlocutors will be guided in making the situated inferences.

Actions that are carried out through the verbal means are called speech acts. They describe the functions of sentences in use. Speech acts are also culturally
In describing speech acts, the components of locution and illocution need to be addressed. The linguistic utterance is situated in the locution while the illocution refers to the intention that accompanies the locution. For example, your roommate says, 'Isn't it hot in here?' You agree with her and reply, 'Yes' and at the same time, you also switch on the fan because you interpret that comment as a request for action.

Task 1  (30 minutes)

Read an excerpt of a dialogue below. Label each turn as to its illocutionary force (greeting, inquiry, complimenting etc.).

Ali : Hey, Ray have you read today’s paper?
Ray : Not yet, what so special?
Ani : There’s another Education Fair in town. Do you want to go?
Ray : Tell me, Ali, what’s so different about this one? It’s going to be just as boring and disappointing as the others we’ve been to. They were just a sheer waste of time and energy. There wasn’t even one good foreign university represented.

Ali : This one is truly international -- there’ll be universities from all over the world. Besides, practically all the local private and public universities and colleges are represented. They say it is the largest ever Education and Career Fair to be organised.
Ray : They always say that. As far as I’m concerned, seen one, seen them all.

Investigations into asymmetrical talk which involve unequal relationships or status reveal how outcomes of the interactions could be dependent on such contexts. Quoting a U.S. study, Mesthrie et al. pointed out marked differences in outcomes between doctor-patient talk and medical student - patient talk. In both instances, the same patient was the other participant. The doctor in the interaction, was unable to make much headway in identifying the cause of the patient's medical problem while the medical student through a more 'open' style was able to elicit pertinent information that explains the patient’s stomach problem.

All these studies serve to explain how the use of contextualization cues set in different cultural experiences could determine interaction outcomes. These cues could be the tone of voice, lexical choice, manner of speech, status, body language and even 'silence'.

The Co-operative Principle

This is based on one of Grice's theory (1975, 1978; in Levinson, 1983: 101), which is about how people use language. He suggests that there is a set of assumptions guiding the how people conduct conversations. These assumptions arise from basic rational considerations and may be formulated as guidelines for the efficient and effective use of language in conversation to further co-operative ends. Grice proposes a general co-operative principle which comprises four basic maxims of conversation. These maxims underlie the efficient co-operative use of language. The co-operative principle is expressed as follows:

'Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (Levinson, 1983: 101).
Participants’ Roles and the Co-construction of Culture

Language use is a cultural act since it reflects the ways in which one individual acts on another individual through such speech acts as thanking, greeting, complimenting, that are variously accomplished in various cultures. Language use is a cultural act as its users co-construct the social roles that define them as members of a discourse community (Kramsch, 1998: 35).

Task 4 (25 minutes)

Read pp. 32 to 35 and give examples of the possible roles a speaker may have to co-construct that define them as members of a discourse community. Discuss this task with your friends and tutor.

Summary

In this unit, we saw that human language is unique in being a symbolic communication system that is learned instead of biologically inherited. Symbols are sounds or things which have meaning given to them by the users. We also looked at how pragmatic coherence may not be maintained. Then we discussed the assumptions that guide speakers in the course of a conversation in the form of the four maxims of the co-operative principle.
Ray: Tell me, Ali, what's so different about this one? It's going to be just as boring and disappointing as the others we've been to. They were just a sheer waste of time and energy. There wasn't even one good foreign university represented.

Expressive: disinterest
Verdictive: making judgement

Ali: This one is truly international -- there'll be universities from all over the world. Besides, practically all the local private and public universities and colleges are represented. They say it is the largest ever Education and Career Fair to be organised.

Representative: making claims
Directive: entreating/persuading someone to engage in an action

Ray: They always say that. As far as I'm concerned, seen one, seen them all.

Representative: making an assertion
Verdictive: appraising

Task 3
Answers

Maxims of Quantity and Relevance.

In spite of this apparent failure, B's answer is co-operative at a deeper (non-superficial) level. We ask ourselves what possible connections there could be between the location of Tom and the location of the van, and thus arrive at the suggestion (which B effectively conveys) that, if Tom has a van, he may be in Mary's house.
UNIT 5: Spoken Language, Oral Culture

Introduction

As a study of language, linguistics is more interested in speech than writing. However, this does not mean that linguists ignore writing as being unimportant; they simply do not consider it as being synonymous with language, and it would not figure significantly in their observations of language. Speech, therefore, is what the linguist examines, and he would view speech as being synonymous with language.

Task 1 (10 minutes)

Based on the short discussion in the above paragraph, how do you think the linguist would relate speech, writing and reality? Discuss this with your friends and your tutor.

Some Differences Between Speech and Writing

One of the differences is that conversational speech is transient while writing can be permanent. Speech is 'linked to the time of its enunciation and to the perception by those present' (Kramsch, 1998: 37). In other words, speech is almost spontaneous while a piece of writing is not.
All types of writing have speech as their base. Spoken language encodes thoughts into speech sounds while writing encodes spoken language into graphic forms. Speech is acquired automatically while writing needs to be learnt (associated with education). As a result, speech is sometimes said to be the primary mode while writing, the secondary mode.

Task 2 (10 minutes)
Now read the sub topic Speech and writing in your text from pages 37 to 41 and summarise the differences between (conversational) speech and writing.

Deixis

Spoken discourse is anchored in the perspectives of the speakers themselves by the use of deictics. The term deixis is Greek in origin and it has the meaning of pointing and indicating. Deixis refers to ‘the ways in which languages encode or grammaticalize features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance’ (Levinson, 1983: 54). Deictic words include ‘demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, tense, specific time and place adverbs like now and here, and a variety of other grammatical features tied directly to the circumstances of utterance’ (Levinson, 1983: 54). Deitic
person deixis (for example, I, you, he). Kramsch (1998: 41) states that social
deictic words ‘give an indication ... of where the speaker stands in time and
place’, that is ‘of his/her status within the social structure, and of the status the
speaker gives the addressee’. An example given by Kramsch is the use of vous
or tu in French and the use of sie or du in German. The use of either one of each
pair can indicate ‘index either power or solidarity, distance or closeness’.
Forms of address in English like Mary, Mary Carter, Miss Carter and Dr Carter
index social class. The French police’s use of tu to address North African youth
expresses display of power. This type of social deixis is sometimes called
attitudinal deixis (Verschueren, 1999:20).

Social Positionings

In this sub topic, two notions are discussed. They are footing and face.

Footing

According to Kramsch (1998: 42), ‘the use of social deictics like pronouns,
forms of address, or names, is one way speakers align themselves to the cultural
context as they understand it’ and ‘changes in intonation and pronunciation can
also indicate changes in our perception of our role as a participant in an
interaction, and in our alignment to others’. This is known as footing (Goffman,
1981: 128), that is ‘the alignments we take up to ourselves and the others present
as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance’.
‘A change in footing is usually marked by a change in register, tone of voice or
bodily orientation’ (Kramsch, 1998: 42). For example, when we speak to the
vegetable sellers and butchers at the market, we tend to align our ways of talking
factors within the conversation itself. It is the latter that is considered as code-switching proper by many writers. Now read paragraph three under the same sub topic (Social positionings) on pages 43 and 44.

It is said that a change in footing is related to a change in the way we understand a particular situation. In other words, ‘[a] change in footing is connected with a change in our frame for events’ (Kramsch, 1998: 44). ‘Frames are the organizational and interactional principles by which situations are defined and sustained as experiences’ (Goffman, 1974, in Schiffrin, 1994: 104). According to Levinson (1983: 281) a frame ‘is a body of knowledge that is evoked in order to provide an inferential base for the understanding of an utterance’. A participation framework is ‘a set of positions that individuals within perceptual range of an utterance may take in relation to that utterance’ (Schiffrin, 1994: 104). Framing is thus one’s ‘ability to apply a frame of interpretation to an utterance or speech event through a contextualization cue’ and the cue can be ‘a switch in social deixis and code’ (Kramsch, 1998: 44). Read the following utterances:

Teacher: Do you understand the explanation?
Child: Yes.

In the understanding and attribution of force or function to the above utterances, reference is made, as relevant, to the frame for teaching.
Brown and Levinson. They are negative face and positive face. The former refers to 'the desire not to be imposed on by others' while the latter refers to 'the desire for appreciation and approval by others' (Swann and Leap, in Mesthrie et al., 2000: 185). And in an interaction, a speaker has to balance a concern for the hearer's face with a desire to protect his/her own face. To do this, a speaker draws on politeness strategies in order to avoid face-threatening acts.

Task 7  (10 minutes)

'Positive politeness' strategies involve the expression of friendliness and/or approval and 'negative politeness' strategies involve not imposing on others or threatening their face' (Swann and Leap, in Mesthrie et al., 2000: 185). Based on this definition, give a specific example for each type of politeness strategy.

Now read the sub topic Protecting face in your text on pages 46 and 47.

Conversational Styles

Different contexts of situation and different contexts of culture in face-to-face verbal exchanges call for different conversational styles. For example, an orate conversational style is usually enacted when friends get together. In such a conversational style, there are frequent interruptions and overlaps in the sequence of turns. However, in a literate journalistic style for example, overlaps do not or seldom occur in the sequence of turns and the whole speech event is in fact, more
Task 8  (15 minutes)

Now read the topic *Narrative style* in your text on pages 49 and 50.
In what ways are the Greek women better 'story tellers'? Discuss this with your friends and tutor.

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Summary

In this unit, we have looked at speech and the differences between speech and writing. We have also looked at the use of deitics in speech. Additionally, we have seen how culture is constructed through the organisation of talk, i.e. through the choice of frames and footing as well as through the way that the two aspects of face are evoked. Culture is also involved in the conversational and narrative styles of members of a particular community. These styles form part of the speakers' cultural identities.
Task 3
Suggested answers

Person deixis – expressions used to point to a person; e.g. me, you, him, them. This type of deixis is subsumed under social deixis (Verschueren, 1999:18).

Place deixis – expressions used to point to a location; e.g. here, there, yonder.

Time deixis - expressions used to point to a time; e.g. now, then, tonight, last week. This type of deixis is also known as temporal deixis (Verschueren, 1999:18).

These deictic expressions have to be interpreted in terms of what person, place or time the speaker has in mind.

Task 4
Suggested answers

See paragraph 1 on page 58.

Task 5
Suggested answers

Code-switching can be defined as the use of two or more languages in the same conversation or utterance (Gardner-Chloros, in Coupland and Jaworski, 1997:361).
UNIT 6: Print Language, Literate Culture

Introduction

As we have seen, speech is the primary way through which we encode language. It precedes writing. Writing is generally recognised as a more recent development and according to Dobrovolsky and O'Grady (in O'Grady et al., 1996: 591), 'writing, the symbolic representation of language in storable graphic, is a comparatively new development having occurred within the past five thousand years and only in certain parts of the world'. While speech is a universal development, writing appears not to be. Being able to write relates to a cultural phenomenon that anchors on the value given to literacy.

In today's context, we are probably most familiar with alphabetic writing which does not overtly show phonemic variations or other suprasegmental features. In effect, writing can be grouped as either phonographic (an example of which is alphabetic writing) or logographic. Logographic writing basically uses signs to represent some form of pronunciation such as the use of symbols which represent entire morphemes or entire words. For example, when 1, 2, 3 or %, $, and + are used to represent certain concepts, they are known as logograms. Given the variety, how did writing begin? According to established sources, it is difficult to pinpoint its origin. However, there is evidence of its development from many cave drawings over more than 20,000 years ago that represent a proto-literate stage.
Quoting Hans Jensen, Bolinger and Sears (1981: 286) narrated the use of rebus messages in a West African tribe where cowrie shells were used as tallies. Six of them is collectively referred to as efa which also means ‘be attracted to’ in their language. Thus a boy sending six cowrie shells to a girl would convey the message of ‘I love you’. In reply, she could send eight shells. Eight is ejo which is also used as a verb form to mean ‘to be in agreement’. In short, she has reciprocated his love through the rebus message.

The first step towards the development of the alphabetic system is attributed to the Greeks who amended the system used by the Phoenicians around 1500 B.C. The Greek writing system later developed into Latin which was the main language of the Roman empire. Through a series of annexation and spread of the Roman empire, their alphabetic writing system exerted a major influence throughout the world.

Pictograms are also recognised as important forerunners for the development of the logographic writing system such as that of Chinese characters and the Egyptian hieroglyphs. As mentioned earlier, a level of sophistication is seen when pictograms are combined to form ideograms. For example, the character of a human being in Mandarin is written as a form with two legs ( 亅 ) and the word ‘door’ ( 门 ) is represented by two pillars. What started as a pictorial representation later encompassed more abstract notions as the base characters were then used to represent other concepts related to those notions.
Writing Systems of Today

From the brief overview on the development of writing, it could be surmised that there are three types of writing being practised today. The alphabetic writing is apparently the most widespread. The logographic system can be identified with Mandarin. In a vast country like China, obvious advantages are associated with this writing system as it serves to unite the many Chinese sub-cultures each with its own dialectic differences and variations. For practical purposes, China today has adopted a spelling system known as ‘pinyin’ which uses the Roman alphabet so that the system would be easy to learn, especially for foreigners.

The syllabic system may be linked to the Japanese ‘kana’ which has 46 character syllabaries. Characters are combined to from various cluster of sounds. The Japanese also has another system ‘Kanji’ which contains symbols that represent individual words. This system is closely related to Mandarin.

The Concept of Literacy

The introduction of a writing system spawned the theory of the ‘Great Divide’ referred to by Kramsch between the oral cultures and the literate cultures. In a traditional sense, one of the components that defines literacy is being able to write. In today’s context, literacy has taken on a wider definition. A new vision of literacy must reflect the complexities of societal needs and the changing dynamics of the cultural environment which constantly reshape the role of language and the written word. There is a host of multiple literacies that need to be addressed - visual literacy, media literacy, information literacy and the list goes
Task 3

Collect 3 types of evidence of writing from foreign publications that illustrate different forms of literacies.

Exploring the Text

It is recognised that the text we use to communicate with today is no longer confined to print media in the form of books. How much meaning we make out from the textual contact depends on many factors which we shall attempt to explore here. To understand a text, we need to link it to discourse which characterises a stretch of language use. In other words, we can refer to it as a language event which can be expressed in a single word like fire or over a series of sentences. The event is perceived as having a beginning and an ending (Werth, P. 1999, Text Worlds: Representing Conceptual Space in Discourse. Longman: Singapore).

Understanding the text from its beginning to its ending is anchored on notions of cohesion and coherence which may be culture-bound. Kramsch raised the following questions in relation to the label on aspirin bottles to illustrate the operation of coherence (p.59).

1. Why is the label entitled 'WARNING' where the danger is not explicitly stated?
personal authority, professional expertise, esthetic style, a democratic majority or an elite model, they are however, at the end of the day flawed. In the context of use, good language is an arbitrary decision and as cultures evolve, the bounds of what is considered good keep changing as the limits of acceptability continually alter.

‘Good’ English is often deliberately defined for a purpose. It is a fact that different social groups use different linguistic varieties. Insights through text analysis could explore the dimension of cultural influences on standard (good) and non standard English. An example of such an exploration is evident in Hudson’s work (1998:743, in Clark, Eschholz and Rosa (Eds.) Language: Readings in Language and Culture. Bedford: Boston) which illustrates how such differences are captured in a literary text such as that found in Great Expectations by Charles Dickens. An excerpt is shown below:

"You are the husband," repeated Miss Havisham, "of the sister of this boy?"

It was very aggravating, but throughout the interview, Joe persisted in addressing me instead of Miss Havisham. ‘Which I meatasay, Pip,’ Joe now observed, in a manner that was at once expressive of forcible argumentation, strict confidence, and great politeness, "as I hap and married your sister, And I were at the time what you might call (if you was any ways inclined) a single man."

"Well!" said Miss Havisham. "And you have reared the boy, with the intention of taking him for your apprentice; is that so, Mr Gargery?"

"You know, Pip," replied Joe, "as you and me were ever friends and it were looked for, and to bewtween us, as being calle' lated and lead to learks. Not but
teaching Literacy in *Reading and Writing: Theory into Practice*, Tickoo, M. L. (Ed.). RELC: Singapore) surveyed the concern of developing knowledge about language in the curriculum in western countries. He highlighted a model in Australia which proposes that ‘students must be taught to be critical both about how language works to build its meaning, and about the nature of those meanings’ (p. 302). In such a system, students are exposed and taught a variety of genres to build up their skills to produce texts which are valued by the community.

Citing the genre of research articles, Kramsch compares the Anglo-Saxon’s and the French’s approaches in writing research articles and found striking differences. Her comparison builds on the work by Swales (1981) and Bahtia (1993). Studying research articles in Physics and Biology published in academic journals, Hidalgo (1995, The Logical Structures of the Introduction of Research Articles in *Reading and Writing: Theory into Practice*, Tickoo, M.L. (Ed.). RELC: Singapore) sought answers as to how the Research Article introduction is developed to identify and delimit the subject under study and specifically how scientific contribution and the credibility of the claims of the research are indicated. He found a common logical structure that characterises the discourse. The field is identified and there is indication of how the article contributes to science. Use of referenced texts is found in the introduction which serves to inform the reader of what is known about the subject and to justify the research carried out.

Genres certainly play a significant role in defining culture and valued meaning. However, conflicts again could arise when textual gatekeepers dictates over what is considered ‘good’ and should be practised about the language. Otherwise, severe
Multiculturalism and ESL Writing

In dealing with writing in English, the ESL learner confronts western standards in rhetoric. Content and form in fact vary from country to country. A study by Purves showed that students' writing on the same topic exhibited considerable differences in focus and patterns of coherence. Details of the study reveal that the students from Australia, Italy, and Thailand produced highly metaphorical, ornamental prose while those from Finland, Nigeria, and Japan, similar to those in the United States of America, preferred a plainer style. Focus on the individual self, a usual approach in western rhetoric could be confusing rather than enhancing to a learner from another culture; for example, it has been reported that Chinese students from China where the proletariat we is the imbibed value faced problems with this technique when writing in English. Even expressing personal opinions could be uncomfortable in a culture where stating opinions is confined to adults rather than young adolescents.

The ESL learner, in learning how to write, needs to be initiated into the act by examining their own conventions and rhetoric and then only move on to make connections to the demands of writing in the western tradition. They need to bridge the cultural gap before taking on the challenges of a new rhetoric.

In examining the ESL situation in colleges in the U.S., Lisle and Mano (1997, in Writing in Multicultural Settings, Severino, C., Guerra, J. C. and Butler, J. E. (Eds.). New York: The Modern Language Association of America) recommends an approach that uses narratives, that of storytelling, to ease the ESL learners from many cultures into the learning of western rhetoric. According to them, stories allow them to explore their cultures through writing and begin the journey...
Against the onslaught, the scenarios offered for the print world do not seem too encouraging. The shrine of knowledge in the form of staid old-fashioned libraries with archives which had reigned supreme for centuries is now threatened by electronic books and virtual libraries. They could well be museum relics in the near future. Some people may argue that only the form is altered while the essentials remain as reading is still unaffected. However, it is difficult to hold things constant as modes of conveyance change and the outcome will manifest itself as it perpetuates into habit formation.

Is the expected change an impending doom especially for those who are not computer savvy or does it hold bright promises of an exciting new age? Speculations abound and some projections according to Birkerts are:

1. There will be language attrition. The move is likely towards ‘plain speak’ with ‘linguistic pre-fab’ as the norm displacing subtitles. Language will be increasingly improvised with literature suffering as difficult texts are simplified. A death knell falls on such masterworks and ‘the civilizing energies of their prose will circulate aimlessly between closed covers’.

2. The sense of history will be eroded. The mind is very much conditioned by how information is accessed. Traditionally, the printed word is given a permanence in the manner of storage. We go by the edition of books to trace their age, with some books having historical value and depth as they capture the essence of their time and age. Our historical sense will change as we resort to networks for information retrieval and the impersonal database will take away that personal feel situated in time and place.
Task 6  (45 minutes)
From your experience, how has the function of the traditional print been taken over by technology?

Describe your experience in about 200 words and share your ideas with your friends in the tutorial. Discuss the issues and arrive at some consensus as to whether the changes had been ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

Task 7  (10 minutes)
What are some examples of Netlingo that are used by interlocutors in e-mail? Here are some of them: AMBW (All my best wishes), B4N (Bye for now), CID (Consider it done), EOM (End of message) and GTG (Got to go). Gather another five (5) examples of your own to add to the repertoire.
**Answers**

**Task 2**

A. How do you read this message?

(From Bolinger and Sears, 1981)

**Answer:** I can see you.

**Task 5**

**Answer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anglo Saxon</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st paragraph - mention of other related research and how their work contributes to the field</td>
<td>Credentials of researcher - status and affiliation of researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit theoretical framework from established sources</td>
<td>Soundness of framework is based on researcher's own merits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End with limitations of study</td>
<td>End by raising more questions and further research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNIT 7: Language and Cultural Identity

Introduction

According to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, speakers’ language use is a series of ‘acts of identity’, in which speakers try to align themselves with, or distance themselves from, certain social groups:

the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from which he wishes to be distinguished (1985: 181).

Thus there seems to be a relationship between language and identity. This is our interest for this unit.

Cultural Identity

The identity mentioned in the previous paragraph is the sense of self and what is known as cultural identity today. In the age prior to the modern era, when societies were more closed and less complex, it was easier to define the linguistic and cultural identities of their members. However, Kramsch (1998: 66) says that it is now more difficult to define the boundaries of any particular social group and the linguistic and cultural identities of its members due to the more open and complex societies that we have now.

According to Kramsch (p. 67), it is equally difficult to define group identity, regional identity and national identity. Thus, although people have long believed
And there is a tension in trying to equate the racial, ethnic, national identity imposed on an individual by the state’s bureaucratic system, and that individual’s self-ascription. According to Kramsch (pp. 67 - 68), ‘group identity is a question of focusing and diffusion of ethnic, racial, national concepts or stereotypes’. We may derive the definition of focusing in this context based on its definition in terms of language varieties, that is ‘the stabilising of a new variety out of the wide range of antecedent varieties’ (Mesthrie, in Mesthrie et al., 2000:68). A parallel notion can be drawn in trying to describe one’s identity. An individual’s impression of another is focused by the classificatory concepts that are prevalent in his or her society. This focus may, in turn, prompt him to identify all others in a particular group based on the same ethnic categories. This latter phenomenon is known as diffusion.

Task 2 (20 minutes)

Read the sub topic Cultural stereotypes on pages 67, 68 and 69 in your text. In your own words, define the term cultural stereotypes.

Language Crossing as Act of Identity

Language crossings such as code-switching and code-mixing are frequent in inter-ethnic communication. Code-switching was explained in Unit 5. Code-mixing occurs when speakers use both languages together to the extent that they change from one language to the other in the course of a single utterance, without
Standard Language

In a community where several dialects of a language are spoken by the various speech communities, usually one of these is selected as the standard variety. Alternatively, an artificial standard language can be created from a multiplicity of dialects. The selection or the creation of a standard language comes about as a result of the need to express national identity among the speakers of that community or society. This standard language is 'an indicator of difference between insiders and outsiders' (Kramsch, 1998: 74 - 75). When a language variety is selected over others in this manner, it gains a symbolic value and becomes the totem of the group. The totemisation of the dominant variety may lead to the stigmatization of the dominated varieties.

A standard language is employed in all areas of communication, including science and technology at a tertiary level. Examples of standard languages are Malay (in Malaysia) and English (in the United Kingdom).

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1 In the study of language and colonialism, Calvet (1974 and 1987, in Phillipson, 1992: 39) refers to languages as either dominant languages or dominated languages in order to express the power relationship between competing languages.
that linguistic imperialism 'dovetails with other types of imperialism and is an integral part of them'.

Let us take English as an example. English linguistic imperialism refers to the dominance of English which is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural (material properties, for e.g. institutions, financial allocations) and cultural (ideological properties, for e.g. attitudes, pedagogic principles) inequalities between English and other languages (p. 47).

Next, we want to look at the term, linguicism. This notion 'involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion' (p. 55). And English linguistic imperialism is a sub-type of linguicism (p. 55).

And 'linguistic imperialism is a primary component of cultural imperialism' although the spread of culture can also be channeled through other means, for example through commercial products of all kinds, films, television serials, advertising agencies abroad, youth culture and the activities in cultural diplomacy (p. 58). English is an apt example of how linguistic imperialism is considered a primary component of cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism has been broadly defined as the global process of structural and ideological incorporation (Schiller, 1976, in Phillipson, 1992: 58). In this sense, English is the language in which this incorporation is taking place, and the structures and ideologies connected with English operate globally (pp. 58–59). In the former, we see the form being incorporated and in the latter, it is the content that is being incorporated.
Summary

In this unit, we saw how language has become a very part of ourselves. It affects the way we perceive our world. It indicates the relationship between oneself and the other members of a given community. In other words, a person’s language is, in some way, related to his or her cultural identity. Many societies have tried to make everyone speak the same language by standardising a particular dialect or language variety. This is important for achieving a common linguistic and thus, cultural identity. This does not seem to auger well since societies are becoming more and more complex with the advent of ICT and consequently, globalisation. Thus, on order there is human communication among us, it is important that ‘the linguistic semiotic capital of humankind remains as rich and as diversified as possible’ (Kramsch, 1998: 77).
Task 5
Suggested answers

a. *Babel* means or signifies confusion. The name Babel is associated with the Hebrew root *bil* ‘to confound’. The name ‘Babîl’ (Bab-il or Bab-ilu) means ‘Gate of God’. The Biblical tale of Babel describes how, in the early days of the world, all mankind spoke the same language. Journeying from the east, they came to the great plains of Babylonia, and settled. They wished to build a tower so high that its top could reach heaven: however God was angry with their arrogance, and as punishment for this excessive human pride, similar to that shown in Eden, God divided the people by giving them different languages and scattering them over the face of the earth.

The ‘Babel threat’ on page 77 of your text does not refer to the threat of different speech communities speaking in different languages that are mutually unintelligible but rather to the threat of one language monopolizing over others.

c. It is important to uphold linguistic rights of each speech community and its individuals because each language provides a uniquely communal, and uniquely individual, means by which human beings apprehend the world and one another. In his book entitled *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), George Steiner locates the root of the ‘Babel problem’ in our deep instinct for privacy and territory, noting that every people has in its language a unique body of shared secrecy.
UNIT: 8  Current Issues

Introduction

This last unit goes into the debate of construction of social reality as a result of language use. It touches on the role of the native speaker and other notions of cross-, inter- and multicultural communication. A number of works are referred to supplement Kramsch’s exposition on current issues. You as the reader should follow the thought-provoking arguments and at the end of it, form your own conclusions on the issues raised. Thus at the end of the unit, you should be able to identify the myths surrounding the learning of English, discuss efforts at forging a national identity through English studies, identify some influences in shaping social reality, describe gender differences in language use, define New Englishes and give opinions on why English is studied.

English Education and Ingrained Myths

In a keynote address by Braj B. Kachru presented at INTELEC ’94 in Kuala Lumpur, he discusses English education in the context of three concentric circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle encompasses the native speakers while the Outer Circle includes countries such as Malaysia and Singapore and the Expanding Circle situates the use of English among countries such as China, Indonesia and Japan. His conceptualisation is shown in the diagram on the next page.
such as Malaysian English, Singlish or Indian English and the interlocutors are mostly those whose English is not their mother tongue.

2. The second myth, the Cultural Identity Myth, concerns the idea that English language and literature represents only one canon with one culture and one literary tradition. In other words, it assumes a monolingual culture. In effect, language is a medium with great diversity. The user interprets and determines how it is used. As Kachru puts it, ‘there is culture in texts and texts embody culture’. Each user portrays a canon, reflective of his peculiar religion, ethnicity, and other influences. In some sense, the individual canons may even be unrelated to the original canon of the Inner Circle, but possess their own growth potential and development with ‘unique mixes of languages and ideologies’.

3. The next myth, The Exocentric Performance Myth, is about whose linguistic performance is acceptable. Must appropriate language be reflective of the Inner Circle’s use? Do we need to follow the standards of Received Pronunciation? Empirically, it has been established that international intelligibility or interaction is independent of the myths discussed so far.

4. The above myths lead to the Native Speaker Idealization Myth which propounds erroneously that the English user in the Inner Circle has one language and one culture. The perpetuation of this myth is not just an academic issue but it arises from other influencing factors among which are ideology and economics.

These myths have far-reaching ramifications in language programmes - they affect language training, planning and policy and ultimately the culture of academia. The myths shape ideologies which are based on how one perceive societal values. They also relate to economic power which is often unbalanced and in favour of the Inner Circle. They
This Core Corpus as she terms it, should be shaped and determined by local talent and power. Accompanying the effort is also the need to reorient interpretative strategies in text response which will allow students to be sensitive to ‘their own social, cultural and historical specificities’. The trainers will have to be empowered with new approaches to effect the dynamic changes in social reality. In short, education planning and policy play a core role in nurturing and shaping a desired national identity.

Policy makers are visionaries in establishing national ideologies, but their work is often in contention with other influences in the arena. These forces at play in the multi-interactive social scene are labelled as ‘The Gang of Four’ by Alan Maley in his ‘The Empire of McDonald Duck’ in The Language-Culture Connection, James, J. (Ed.), RELC: Anthology Series 37.

In his paper, Maley looks at how language is increasingly used through hegemonic means - advertisement, globalisation, media and trivialisation (the Gang of Four) to control behaviour. We are often conditioned by advertisements and had come to accept values of consumerism as a way of life. ‘One new McDonald Outlet Every Six Hours’ is newsworthy and the future looks bright for more outlets to come. Consumerism is inseparable from globalisation which encompasses effects of tourism, profit-taking and commercialisation. Cultural boundaries are constantly erased and redefined. Transculturalism becomes a feature word and with its advancement, both positive and negative impacts are propagated. On the one hand, there is the spread of choice and advantage of experience, on the other, identity is destabilised with less than desired mutations in lifestyle and habits.

The media lends a helping hand with its rapid development especially in computer-mediated communication in the creation of new trends and values. The danger lies in controlling what we think or worst still, in conditioning us not to think at all. Going
is a deliberate avoidance of syllables that occur in the names of their in-laws in particular those who are male. Such instances of gender-bias language use serve to illustrate the notion of power relations as a result of social distinctions in society. Aside from the practice of dominance of one gender over another, other studies have found differences in gender preference for ‘prestige language’. Trudgill, (1983a, quoted by Mesthrie et al., 2000) based on data gathered, suggests that women are more status-conscious and thus prefer more prestige forms while the men lead in language change that leans towards the vernacular. Trudgill’s claim about women’s preference for prestige forms has been subject to debate but there had been support for the connection between masculinity and the vernacular.

Conversational styles have also been found to be different between sexes. Among the many studies carried out, some general observations are:

1. Male speakers interrupt more than females especially in contexts that are formal or public

2. Females interrupt less than the males in conversations

3. Females are more likely to be uncertain and tentative about claims and use more tag questions to hedge

4. Females are more generous with compliments and receive more of them too

Such binary distinctions are subject to challenge as more work is done in the field. Gender studies of this nature are constantly refashioned as speakers’ identities come under greater scrutiny. Stereotyping should be avoided. Power in fact is not fixed but fluid. The complexities continued to be unravelled with new challenges to counter
1. Repeated use of a noun phrase to stand as a pronoun as in
   East African English: My daughter, she is attending the University of Nairobi.
   Singapore: But my grandsons, they know to speak Malay.
   Bangladesh: People, they don't have that sort of belief now.

2. Limited variation in the use of tag questions such as the overuse of *isn’t it?*
   West African English: He loves you, *isn’t it?*
   India: He is going there, *isn’t it?*
   (from Platt et al., 1984, in Mesthrie et al., 2000)


She quotes from Gumperz, (1982) an example of a cross-examination of a Filipino doctor in an English court of law to illustrate the differences:

Q1: Did you check to determine if dehydration was present?
A1: Yes.
Q2: What steps did you take to determine that? If it was there or absent?
A2: When the child came, I initially examined the patient and I noted the moistness of the tongue, sunken eyes, the skin colour, and everything was okay.
Q3: Are you suggesting that there were no sunken eyes?
A3: No.
Q4: I think we better slow down a little bit more and make sure the record ... did you observe sunken eyes?
A4: No.
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Given the varieties, which model then is deemed desirable for learning? In a survey carried out among Malaysian teachers by Nooreiny Maarof and Kemboja Ismail (1995, in Proceedings of INTELEC '94, 16-18 August 1994, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), findings indicate that British English is well-anchored as the choice for pronunciation. Less than 20% of the teachers felt that Malaysian English should be the model in the classroom. The local accent is not favoured. These findings point to the perpetuation of the myths discussed by Kachru which serve as obstacles to the cultivation of a ‘owned’ variety in language use. Homogenisation is still viewed as the norm and diversity or ‘New’ Englishes have yet to gain acceptance.

Why do we Study English?

In discussing English education, perhaps we need to take stock of why we need English as a second language or foreign language. It is often a language that is hardly used by the majority of the students once they are out of the classroom. What are the justifications for pursuing an effort that does not seem to yield immediate returns. Rather it brings much frustration to both the teacher and the learner. If we tag it as a world language, statistics say that less than 15% of the world population use English. It is definitely not the most widely spoken language in the world in terms of the number of native speakers. Numbers like these do not indicate how important English is as a world language. Fundamentally, it is a question of what it is used for. The uses are still very much discussed as they have a bearing on the weight or emphasis placed on its learning. It is worthwhile to put into perspective this issue and spend some time looking for the answers. Some answers are provided by Kitao’s ‘Why Do We Teach English?’ in The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. II No. 4, April 1996. He noted that:
Task 3 (45 minutes)

Examine the context of learning English in Malaysia. What are the uses that justify the learning of English in Malaysia? Write your answer in about 350 words.

Summary

The rise of world Englishes makes it almost impossible to see English as belonging to just any one ethnic group. The multicultural outlook necessitates the recognition of multicultural identities. As Kramsch puts it, the term muticultural brings with it two levels of meaning. At societal level, it deals with the coexistence of people from many backgrounds and ethnicities and for the individual, there are a multiplicity of roles to play as he selects his community and engages in the interactional context he finds himself in. All this calls for tolerance, empathy and recognition of other cultures as we go about our lives realising ‘the marvelous difference and diversity among and within human beings’. Much of the exercise is brought forth through the use of language. In sum, language brings about culture and culture brings about language - such is the symbiotic relationship.
2. Economic prudence -- cutting down cost of sending students overseas, setting up of twinning programmes which use English as the medium of instruction
3. Globalisation in trade and communication
4. Malaysia's aspiration as a regional centre of academic excellence


Tickoo, M. L. (Ed.). *Reading and Writing: Theory into Practice*. Singapore: RELC.

