

## **Culture and Languages Learning**

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**Abstract.** *This article discusses the significance of culture in learning foreign languages, enriched with examples. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a crucial element that provides insight into the culture, traditions, and worldview of a nation. It is emphasized that learning a language should not be limited to grammatical rules but should also consider its cultural context.*

*The study examines the influence of culture on language, the values, customs, and social norms expressed through language. Additionally, methodologies for understanding and reflecting culture during the language learning process are discussed. Learning a language within a cultural context is enriched with practical recommendations that can assist students in acquiring new languages.*

**Key words:** *culture, foreign language, homeland, education, communication, methodology, educational system.*

Language learning is a complex process that involves not only the alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar but also understanding the content, norms of behavior, and cultural standards. With the advent of new information technologies, interactions between cultures have evolved, reflecting in daily life, education, and communication. For instance, when students learn a new language, they also acquire cultural contexts, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively. Learning a language involves understanding all its aspects, including location, history, and culture, fostering a deep connection between language and culture. Scholars like Gao, Tang, and Xu emphasize that "language is culture," supporting the intrinsic link between the two. Researchers highlight the need to consider cultural competence in all aspects of language learning, ensuring learners acquire social skills through the target language. Language is used as a means of communication and as a unity of culture. In English language teaching, there are two opposing perspectives on the relationship between language and culture: the first emphasizes the integral connection, as noted in a paper by Biram and Grandy in 2003. However, the second perspective argues that English should be learned individually within cultural contexts, as highlighted by Sardin in his 2002 book. These discussions reflect whether language and culture are interconnected or separate concepts.

Understanding culture should be a central theme in educational programs, a point emphasized by Bennet and others in their 2003 arguments. They identify several misconceptions about excluding culture from language teaching.

Firstly, they argue that existing language programs are developed in such a way that integrating cultural understanding into the curriculum is challenging. Secondly, many teachers find it difficult to teach the culture of a certain people, feeling unprepared for teaching cultural competencies, which leads to a lack of practical experience in culturally-infused teaching. This results in some higher

education institutions preferring to teach language and culture separately, focusing instead on preparing students for universal or national tests, consequently neglecting cultural education. For meaningful cultural exchange, each component in language must convey meaning.

The Interrelation of Language and Culture Krash emphasizes the importance of focusing on elements essential to our daily lives. When discussing the relationship between language and culture, it's crucial to define "culture." Various attempts have been made to interpret this concept. For instance, G.V. Yelizorova considers "culture" to be an intuitive yet complex notion that is difficult to define comprehensively. Culture can be summarized as "how we live here," encompassing all its aspects. There are over a hundred definitions of culture, highlighting its variability. The notion of the connection between language and culture holds a significant place in the history of linguistics and philosophy. Wilhelm von Humboldt argued that while language is universal, world languages differ, each reflecting a distinct worldview. He believed that mental capabilities are inherent to nations and that languages and cultures express the "spirit of the people," showcasing differences in cognitive abilities.

Sapir noted that while the typological features of language may not directly correlate to distinct cultural forms, a language's vocabulary reflects cultural characteristics. Whorf advanced this idea, suggesting structural differences between languages are indicative of varying thought processes, positing linguistic relativity (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) where language is a key to understanding specific cultures.

Understanding the interplay between language and culture is crucial as linguistic, social, and cultural diversity grows in modern societies. In linguistics and language teaching, language and culture are often seen as interrelated; language serves not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol of an individual's cultural identity. Acquiring expressive tools and understanding their stylistic and semantic richness is essential for speakers. Material cultural legacies are preserved as part of a historical narrative, similar to how language evolves. Thus, learning a language requires awareness of the mentalities, national traits, and traditions of its speakers, ensuring a comprehensive grasp of cultural nuances. The relationship between language and culture is complex and multi-dimensional. In ethnology, language is often seen as a reflection of the entire small community that constitutes an ethnos, encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural aspects of life. Here, culture is understood as a representation of society, akin to the term "society" itself. The interplay between cultural and social anthropology has led to a definition of "society" as a group of individuals who live and act together, forming specific relationships, alongside their culture reflecting their lifestyle and activities.

However, it is impossible to entirely separate these two concepts. There are over a hundred definitions of culture, emphasizing its diversity. In essence, culture is an integral part of human existence and a spiritual component of human activity, manifesting in various forms that carry social significance. Culture is both a process and a product of spiritual creation, making it a vital element of the economic, political, and social systems. It shapes and represents norms, values, and knowledge across different components, such as art, religion, ideology, and science.

Cultural production plays a crucial role in society, ensuring that it does not turn into ineffective consumption or mere service. It is essential for any effective production process. Culture expresses its essence through morality, law, religion, art, and knowledge systems. From a sociological perspective, the characteristics, principles, and dynamics of societal culture should be assessed beyond just artistic production and religious or legal frameworks. Culture also manifests in practical forms—events and processes that involve various layers, groups, and individuals. Historical events and processes related to economic, social, and political life are rooted in cultural foundations, deriving from the cultural history and heritage of specific societies. The emergence and acceptance of religion, the formation of states, social unrest, invasions and wars, political reforms, liberation movements, technological revolutions, and scientific discoveries all showcase cultural patterns that shape societies and international relations.

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a person's worldview is largely defined by the language they speak. Whorf argued that the grammatical categories of a language not only convey the speaker's thoughts but also shape their ideas and cognitive processes. Consequently, speakers of different languages have diverse perceptions of the world, leading to misunderstandings if their languages are structurally distinct.

For instance, the structure of the Korean language differs significantly from that of Russian. The Korean alphabet (Hangul), created by King Sejong in the 15th century, reflects an aspect of Korean culture and allows for a phonetic writing system that was more accessible to the general populace. Prior to Hangul, Chinese characters were used, which were difficult for ordinary people to learn.

The cultural perspectives of Koreans on the world markedly differ from those of Russians. In Korea, there is a strict respect for age and formal hierarchy, which is reflected in their language where four levels of politeness exist based on age or status. For example, informal speech with a teacher is often perceived as disrespectful or insulting, highlighting the importance of language in expressing cultural norms.

In Korean, each type of relationship has its own specific communication rules, a feature not found in the Russian language. This supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, indicating that speakers of different languages may be governed by distinct thought structures when conversing. Overall, understanding a culture is essential to learning its language. There is a notion that the phonetic nature of languages is influenced by physical environments. For instance, languages of people living in mountainous or harsh conditions may develop sharp sounds, while communities in more temperate climates often possess phonetic systems that are more pleasant to the ear. Such theories can be easily refuted as they may seem reliable on the surface.

For example, Indigenous people along the northwestern coast of America thrive on a rich variety of marine life. While they live in a challenging climate, their language demonstrates phonetic precision that rivals Caucasian languages. Conversely, it can be argued that few live in harsher conditions than the Eskimos. Indeed, languages with similar phonetic systems often emerge in continuous regions with comparable physical environments. However, it's essential to recognize that we are not solely dealing with the direct influence of the environment but also less tangible psychological factors that affect the spread of cultural elements.

Languages such as Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, and Salish exhibit phonetic similarities not merely due to common ecological conditions but because their speakers inhabit geographically adjacent areas, allowing for potential psychological influence among them.

"Language is a mirror of culture; it reflects not only the real world surrounding individuals and the conditions of their lives but also social consciousness, mentality, national character, lifestyle, customs, ethics, and value systems."

Language and culture are inseparable; one cannot analyze a people's language without considering their cultural and national characteristics. The language and culture of a nation evolve simultaneously. Over time, as culture changes and new values emerge, language too evolves with new expressions. Cultural anthropology focuses on the results of human activities across various societal sectors, shaped by factors such as ideas, beliefs, customs, and traditions.

Cultural anthropology studies the development of culture from various perspectives, including lifestyle, worldview, mentality, national character, and the results of human spiritual, social, and productive activities. It explores the unique ability of humans to develop culture through communication, especially verbal communication, while examining the diversity of human cultures and their interactions and conflicts. Special attention is given to the interaction between language and culture.

The idea that language shapes thought allowed for a factual (linguistic) basis for studying this concept. The movement of linguistic facts and the development of grammatical categories are considered forms of thought processes. Thus, by examining the fundamental concepts of language and culture, we can observe how social and cultural changes are reflected in language.

In conclusion, this article emphasizes the importance of focusing on the relationship between language and culture and explains why teaching culture should be an integral part of foreign language curriculums. A deep analysis of literature aims to contribute to a better understanding of the significant aspects of culture in the process of learning foreign languages. Language learning or teaching should not be limited to understanding the grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of the target language but should also involve the study of that language's culture.

According to scholars like Pulitzer and Brusk, "Language and culture are the same concepts." Educators should not only present and describe how intercultural communication occurs to their students but also apply practical tools, such as games or simulations, that can effectively facilitate intercultural communication. Successful communication between cultures and individuals cannot happen without an understanding of one another. The purpose of learning a foreign language alongside its culture is to analyze communication issues, focusing on both language and culture, to facilitate communication between different cultures and to prevent conflicts. Language and culture are interconnected and cannot be separated, as language itself is a part of culture. Teaching culture enables students to enhance their understanding of people's lifestyles, beliefs, values, and language skills. Evidence shows that if educators promote cultural understanding in their language teaching methods, students can achieve greater success in language learning. This means that students will gain essential resources not only in terms of language but also regarding the cultures of the languages they are learning. This is crucial, as culture predates the emergence of language.

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