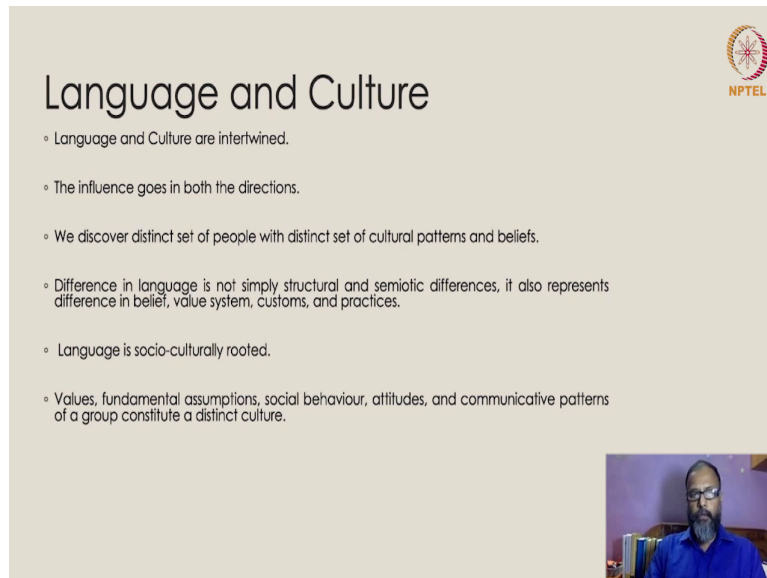



Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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Significance of Culture in Language Learning/Teaching


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Language and Culture

- Language and Culture are intertwined.
- The influence goes in both the directions.
- We discover distinct set of people with distinct set of cultural patterns and beliefs.
- Difference in language is not simply structural and semiotic differences, it also represents difference in belief, value system, customs, and practices.
- Language is socio-culturally rooted.
- Values, fundamental assumptions, social behaviour, attitudes, and communicative patterns of a group constitute a distinct culture.



Welcome to class, today we are going to talk about the significance of culture in language learning and teaching. We have been discussing how language is socio-culturally rooted, role of culture, importance of culture in language learning and teaching. That is what we are going to talk about today. We already discussed how language and culture are intertwined. And the influence goes in bi-directional mode.

So, language influences culture and culture also influences language. So, the influence goes in both directions. We discover a distinct set of people with a distinct set of cultural patterns and beliefs and practices. We all have acquired our mother tongue in a particular social cultural space and we all construct knowledge about the environment, about the media society, about the culture we are growing through the input from the immediate environment. So, whatever belief system, value system, the customs, practices, patterns, lifestyle, they all are implicitly embedded. They are embedded into the structures that we construct in language. The terms, the utterances, the phrases, the words that we learn, we learn them in a context. See, when we learn a word, we not only learn the spelling of the word or sound of the word, meaning of the word but also the context in which these words are used.

So, when as a child we acquire our native language, we are learning this in a three dimensional way. So, word learning word becomes learning of the sound system. Learning of the meaning that words represent or the meaning that is encoded in the word and the context in which these words are used. And when we say context, then of course, we are referring to the socio-cultural context not only linguistic contexts but also social and cultural contexts in which these words and expressions are used. So, they cannot be separated, language and culture cannot be separated. They are deeply rooted and interdependent. So, our values, our fundamental assumptions, social behavior, attitudes and communicating patterns, socialization patterns, networking. These are the things that constitute a particular society or a particular group. And we cannot teach culture and society apart from language.

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Interaction, Socialization, and Sharing

- Alfred L. Kroeber:
 - Culture started when speech was available, and from that beginning, the enrichment of either one led the other to develop further.
 - Culture is the consequence of interaction and the act of communication is their cultural manifestation/assertion.
 - Culture in a complex definition includes beliefs, arts, skills, moralities, laws, traditions and behaviours that an individual, as a member of a society, gets from his own society.
 - Taylor, E.B. (1974). *Primitive Culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. New York: Gordon Press




If you recall we also talked about Kroeber, Alfred L. Kroeber, you know, initial lectures and a very powerful statement Kroeber makes and the statement is “Culture started when speech was available. And from that beginning, the enrichment of either one led the other to develop further.” You can imagine the time when we started settling in social groups, if we go to the prehistoric periods and how human beings would have settled in social groups. That all must have started with interaction, so that is what Kroeber is referring to. He says that, “Culture is the consequence of interaction and the act of communication is the cultural manifestation and assertion.

If you look at Taylor, E.B. Taylor says culture in a complex definition includes belief, art, skill, moralities, laws, tradition and behaviors that an individual as a member of society gets


in his own society. So, culture is an umbrella term, it encompasses everything and all activities that we do. And in a particular socio-cultural context, our activities, our associations, our relationships, our socialization patterns, they all have a common pattern. And this commonality binds us together. If you recall, we talked about Martha's Vineyard Island story while we were doing William Livocks work, we were talking about William Livocks work, is work in Martha's Vineyard Island, we talk about it and how some of the inhabitants of a particular age group would consider themselves as the custodian of the cultural values and social fabric pattern a network. They wanted to preserve and sound distinct from the summer visitors whom they never liked on the island. And in order to make a distinction they deliberately and consciously use (())(6:21) to sound different, that was the urge for an identity, that was the urge for an identity, to be sounding different and this is exactly what they did.

And you can recall about other variations studies that we talked about, everywhere you find that element present very much there in all the (())(6:45) and sentences and expressions and discourse that have been referred to and the social structure, how the socialist structure was embedded in their linguistic structures, and how the linguistic structure mimicked or represented their social structure, their social stratification if we recall those discussions. So language and culture are inseparable and intertwined. So, why we are discussing it today? We are discussing it today to be sensitive towards these things, these nuances, cultural nuances, social nuances embedded in the linguistic structures. Because when you learn a language, a new language, when you learn a second language, you are not learning the language in terms of words, sounds, sentences, vocabulary, you know and other grammatical features. But we learn a language to make sense and create meaning and derive meaning out of these structures. And these structures are socio-culturally rooted. So, language opens a new window to look into a new culture, a new language exposes you or opens up an entirely new world for you. And that is why, while learning and teaching, the role of culture, the importance of culture becomes very significant.

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- Every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication in either an explicit or implicit sense" (p. 104).
 - Sapir, E., (1956). *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Language is a systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self expression".
 - Crystal, D. (1971). *Linguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true." The concept of a sound-image or symbol in different languages is different.
 - Saussure, F. de. (1974). *Course in General Linguistics*. tr. Wade Baskin. London: Fontana.



And to quote a few scholars as you can see on the slides you know, I quote from Sapir and he says, "Every cultural pattern and every single act of social behavior involves communication in either an explicit or implicit sense." So, basically, socialization and interaction cannot happen without the socio-cultural context. So, the meaning is there, right.

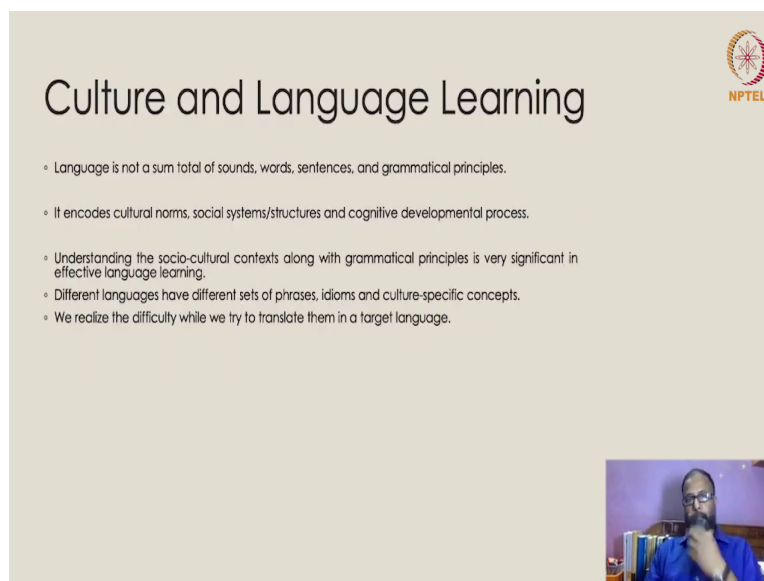
If you look at David Crystal 1971, what does he say? He says, "Language is a systematic, conventional use of sound, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression. We already have talked about Saussure's idea of signifiers (9:29), Saussure's idea of signified (9:32). We have already talked about communicative competence and idea of communicating competence by Dell Hymes. We have already talked about communicative competence and how learning a language is all about making meaning. So, I will not repeat them here, you can go back to those videos of the first week and you can learn my second week, third week, so early, early part of the of the course and you can find details of all of these vague systemic functions of language like a speaking model, like communicative competence, like a Sapir and Whorf hypothesis, we have already done all these things. So, I will cut short and come directly to the topic.

Saussure says, "If words stood for pre-existing concepts", Saussure says, "If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalence in meaning from one language to the next but this is not true." The concept of a sound image or symbol is different in different languages. So, he is saying that these concepts are not independent, they are socio

culturally rooted. And that is why if words stood for pre-existing concepts, they will have the exact equivalent in all other languages which is not the case.

We know that translation becomes so difficult when we look at the text and when we are translating one text from one language to the other language in target language; we find that there is a pattern in congruity and the equivalent expressions are not available. And in that case, because equivalent concepts are not available, it gets very difficult to translate idioms, phrases or metaphorical use of language unless and until we are familiar with the particular culture and society in which these languages are used. So, as a learner, we need to understand the social structure, the cultural pattern, the belief system, the value system in order to make sense in the target language or the language you have targeted to learn. And that is why teaching and learning of cultural patterns, social beliefs, cultural beliefs, value systems, lifestyle, social behavior becomes so important.

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The slide is titled "Culture and Language Learning" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains five bullet points:

- Language is not a sum total of sounds, words, sentences, and grammatical principles.
- It encodes cultural norms, social systems/structures and cognitive developmental process.
- Understanding the socio-cultural contexts along with grammatical principles is very significant in effective language learning.
- Different languages have different sets of phrases, idioms and culture-specific concepts.
- We realize the difficulty while we try to translate them in a target language.


In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.

So, the role of culture in language learning and we say language, language learning is not a sum total of learning of sounds of that language, learning of words in the language, sentences, structures and grammatical principles. Language encodes cultural norms, social systems, structures and it plays a very significant role in cognitive development of the learners. So, understanding sociocultural contexts along with grammatical principles is very significant in effective language learning and teaching. And we have a lot of research and interest generated in the area where scholars have talked at length about the significance of teaching and learning of culture and cultural norms and values in second language or foreign language


teaching learning scenarios. So, different languages have different sets of phrases, idioms, and cultural specific concepts. For example, if you take a Hindi example phrase 'Lakshman Rekha' that is very difficult to construct and translate Lakshman Rekha in English. We do not find such an equivalent, because Lakshman Rekha is not simply a structure or a phrase. It is rooted into the whole understanding of the mythological story, whole understanding of social belief and the meaning, loaded meaning, so it is a loaded term Lakshman Rekha, word like Maryada.

Now a Hindi word like Maryada, can we call it limits? It is not limit, simply it is not limit. Because it is very difficult to find an equivalent in English because the word Maryada, the phrases Like Lakshman Rekha, they are loaded, they have cultural connotations, they have certain social beliefs associated with them and certain practices associated with them. So, the way native speakers of Hindi interpret these words and expressions. It is very difficult to translate in English and vice versa, the British society and social patterns, concepts, practices and norms difficult to be translated in any of the other languages. Because the languages are socio-culturally rooted, they are deeply connected. And we realize the difficulty while we try to translate them and this difficulty is nothing but our act of disassociating or delinking language from the culture. In order to translate and make sense, it is important to understand the context in which these phrases, these words are used. And that is why you can make sense you can make meaning only when you understand that culture where the language is rooted and when we learn a particular language, when we teach a foreign language or learn a foreign language, it is important that culture becomes the fifth skill. So, we have four integrated skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These are linguistic skills, language skills. But now people are arguing for culture as the fifth skill. So, now is your five skills integrated skills because culture remains an integrated part of all teaching learning processes of second language or foreign language.

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- Learning a language is about learning a new culture, lifestyles, attitudes, ways of thinking, a new and different logic; it is all about understanding individual behaviour, social behaviour, and new values.
- Indeed, teaching a foreign language does not only require providing students with syntactic structures, new vocabulary and expressions, but also to incorporate major cultural elements and pragmatic meanings, which are intertwined with the language itself.
- Culture is considered a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing, due to the international role of the English language and globalization (Tomalin, 2008).



So, when we say learning a foreign language or learning a second third language, it is all about learning a new culture, lifestyle, attitude, way of thinking, a new and different logical understanding. It is all about understanding individual as well as social behavior and a set of new value systems. Indeed, teaching a foreign language does not only require providing students or learners with syntactic structures, new vocabulary and expressions. But also to incorporate major cultural elements and pragmatic understanding which are intertwined with the language itself. Culture is considered to be the fifth language skill as I pointed out. So, when we say language learning, we focus on four integrated skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, four language skills. Language becomes the fifth one, I am sorry, culture becomes the fifth one.

So, now we talk in terms of five skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and understanding culture. So, when we are learning and teaching of foreign languages, we are talking in terms of the five skills. Out of which the fifth skill culture remains as a foundation of acquiring these four skills. It remains in the background, but not passively there, very proactively there and it constitutes the background of learning these four skills. That is the role of culture in learning a language and teaching a foreign language.

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The slide features a title 'Culture as the Foundation of Communication' in the top left, an NPTEL logo in the top right, and three bullet points. A small video inset in the bottom right shows a man with a beard and glasses speaking.

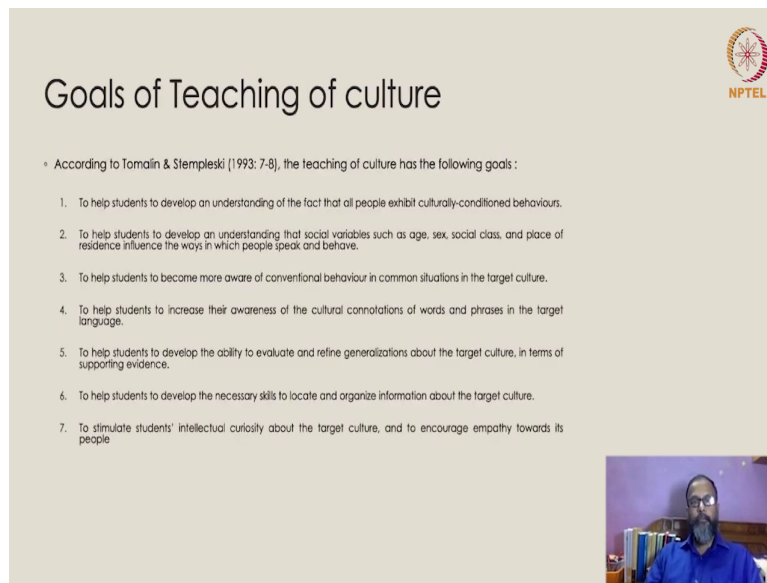
Culture as the Foundation of Communication

NPTEL

- Culture and communication are interdependent.
- Culture governs the entire phenomenon of communication in terms of who talks to whom, about what, and how it continues.
- It also helps us in making meaning of the messages.

So, when you look at culture and language, culture is the foundation considered as the foundation of communication. And if you recall, the whole idea is that who talks to whom, what, when, why and how. The whole process is governed by cultural understanding. So ,what to talk, when to talk, whom to talk, how to talk, why to talk. These are all governed by cultural understanding. So, culture is considered as the foundation of communication. They are interdependent and they are inseparable. So, culture governs the entire phenomenon of communication in terms of who talks to him about what and how it continues, how the process continues. And this is how it makes us understand the meaning and make sense of it.

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The slide is titled "Goals of Teaching of culture" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It lists seven goals for teaching culture, attributed to Tomain & Stempleski (1993: 7-8). A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking.

Goals of Teaching of culture

According to Tomain & Stempleski (1993: 7-8), the teaching of culture has the following goals :

1. To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours.
2. To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
3. To help students to become more aware of conventional behaviour in common situations in the target culture.
4. To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
5. To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
6. To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
7. To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people

Now, why do we need to teach when learning the culture of a second language or foreign language. So, there are many arguments for that. But we can summarize these arguments in terms of seven goals that Tamalin and Stempleski, 1993 point out. And what are these goals?

Number one, we are required to teach culture, we are required to make the learner acquainted with the socio-cultural context of the language in order to help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally conditioned behaviors. So, when we say behavior, social behavior, their social culturally conditioned, their social culturally oriented. So, in order to acquaint the learners we need to help the students to develop an understanding of that. Then number two, to help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave. And I do not have to explain this point because the entire discussion on variation studies initiated by William Labov with a new methodology followed by many of the other social linguists. They all established the fact that social structures are represented and encoded in the linguistic structures. So, all this social indices like sex, gender, age, class, reason, race everything will have appearing on the linguistic instructors in some way or the other and these are all established facts. And we have discussed them in terms of Martha's Vineyard Island case in terms of English in New York city case by William Labov, (23:21), we have already discussed all of these (23:30). So, we have done separate videos on language variation and social stratification of values. We can go to those videos and refresh our understanding again. Third goal is to help children to become more

aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture. We all speak English, but Indian English appears different from British English not only in terms of linguistic structures, but also in terms of socio-cultural boundaries. So, it is not only linguistic structures and the sounds, the words, the semantic expressions, and the structure of sentences. For example, Indian language, an Indian English have lots of duplications. It also bears culturally sensitive and socially oriented expressions, belief systems and patterns that you find in abundance in Indian English. So, English is one language with multiple cultures and that is why English at different places becomes Englishes because it is rooted in that particular socio-cultural context. So, even if we take the example of it, otherwise, all languages are rooted in their socio-cultural context. In order to help students, learners understand these nuances of language and its relationship with culture, it is important that they are exposed to the cultural belief systems, the cultural patterns, social beliefs, value systems, lifestyle, and social behavior of the speakers. And it becomes pertinent and significant for them to learn in order to make sense when they use expressions.

Number four, to help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language. That as I told you, the idioms, phrases, frozen expressions, proverbs, they are all culturally rooted. So, if you want to understand the meaning of them, you need to understand the social and cultural context in which they are used. And that is why it becomes very important for all of us while teaching or learning foreign language or second language or third language to understand these nuances. Number five, to help students develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture in terms of supporting evidence. So, when you are familiar with cultural patterns, it will be easy for you to mix with the speakers of the language. It will be easy for you to relate to that community society where the language is located.

Number six, to help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture. And number seven, last but not least, to stimulate learners and to students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture and to encourage empathy towards its people. So, knowing about the culture, through language, helps you understand the people, its speakers, their social behavior, their cultural beliefs, norms, practices, lifestyle and everything that you can imagine. So, culture opens a window. And learning a new language opens a window to learn a new culture. So, when you are introduced to a new language, you are also introduced to a new culture, a new society. And you can

explore it plausibly only when you are familiar not only with linguistic structures and patterns but also social structure and cultural patterns. And that is why learning and teaching of culture in a second language or foreign language classroom becomes so important.

Culture is considered the fifth skill, four skills being listening, speaking, reading and writing, the fifth one is culture and that is the significance of culture in teaching and learning of language in a foreign language teaching classroom, learning classroom or a second language, third language learning teaching classroom. So, this is it, this is how we establish the interdependence and a very deeper connection of language and culture. And also, we highlight the importance of understanding culture while learning a new language by learning a foreign language. So, this is it for now. And you can go to the earlier lectures in the course, where we have talked about how linguistic structures represent an input, the cultural values and the cultural patterns. So, how social structures are represented by language structures and the entire enterprise of variation tradition? Variation tradition is all about establishing this fact that social structures are represented, encoded and embedded in the linguistic structures. So, this is for now. Thank you very much.