CULTURAL TOLERANCE AND ITS LINK WITH LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

Individuals exposed to a new culture will soon experience and realize the existence of a languages barrier in their interactions with native speakers. The realization usually entails an attempt to familiarize oneself with the new language in the context of its culture. Prolonged exposure to that culture will enhance their capacity to use the language in an elaborate manner. Hypothetically, greater fluency in the language will lead to greater tolerance for the new culture. Individuals who are proficient in different languages thus can be assumed to have higher cultural tolerance. Supportive information is provided in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the components of intercultural competence. However, the definition of intercultural competence is limited, as it does not incorporate the level of tolerance achieved by a culturally competent language user. To understand the role of multilingualism in cultural tolerance, a subsequent measure of the latter is pertinent.

Keywords: Cultural tolerance, language, intercultural competence

Multilingualism and its properties came into the limelight after the publication of Language Loyalty in the United States by Fishman, Nahirny, Hoffman, and Hayden (1966), which dealt with language maintenance and their shifts as a consequence of inter-community interactions. The study was conducted on non-English speaking immigrants in America who had to tackle both the language and cultural barrier, in a period, when learning a new language was not as readily available as it is today. The study comes under the field of psycholinguistics which investigates language use, production, acquisition, and comprehension. It showed how languages had always played an essential role in our everyday lives and how much they were intertwined with our surrounding culture and thought processes (von Humboldt, 1988; Cohen, 1956; Lado,1957; Sapir, 1939; Carroll, 1940).

The field of psycholinguistics has often been linked to culture and multilingualism especially in the context of individual differences (Tohidian, 2009; Hadley 1997; Lado,1957; Fishman, Nahirny, Hoffman, & Hayden, 1966; Dewaele & Wei, 2013). Lado's (1957) Linguistics across cultures presents research on the acquisition of language, developing the idea of contrastive linguistics. The basic concept presented by Lado (1957) was how to acquire a foreign language by understanding the difference between their mother tongue and the target language. He talked about contrastive descriptions, where the target language was compared with the native language while creating a lesson plan. As an instance, Lado (1957) laid out the contrast for Spanish and English at every level of linguistic structure as well as variations found in the culture.

Cohen's (1956) Pour une sociologie du langage delved more deeply into the creation of social segmentation due to differences in language. In his opinion, a language can alleviate, as well as create, social segmentation. Giving support to Cohen, Bruner (1985) used the sociological approach to argue that demography, economy, politics and culture could determine the ethnolinguistic dynamism of a speech community. Culture thus plays an integral role in acquisition and maintenance of languages. The link between culture and language has always been pursued by cultural anthropologists. Most of their arguments were based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1939).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis outlines the effect of language on habitual thought. Today, known as a paradigm in linguistics and cognitive sciences, it was the first to propose how a structure of a language would effect its speakers' cognition and world view. Whorf (Carroll, 1940) said that language and culture had grown up together. His theory of relativity stated that individuals who speak different languages would not comprehend each other unless they were to calibrate the two languages or translate so that the essence of the culture would not be lost. In the process of calibrating, the individuals would understand cultural aspects of the foreign language.

A recent study conducted by Dewaele and Wei (2013), on multilingualism, indicated that a higher level of proficiency in languages was linked to higher tolerance of ambiguity. Individuals thus would become more tolerant to uncertainty when they were exposed to more languages. Tolerance of ambiguity is one of the factors contributing to intercultural competence, and thereby empirically linking each culture to its respective language.

In all these studies, culture has taken a multifaceted definition, and they have all slightly differed from each other. Hence defining culture has always been a disputable task. Needless to say, many researchers and keen observers have tried to ameliorate the definition. Altogether, they have reached somewhat closer to the essence (Hudson,1960; Goodenough, 1970; Duranti, 1997). However, the definitions differed depending upon the fields – Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Philosophy – or its purpose – political or historical (Multilingualism, cultural

identity and education in Morocco by Ennaji, 2005). From the anthropological point of view, Culture is defined as learned and shared behavioral patterns characteristic of a group of people. Your culture is learned from relatives and other members of your community as well as various material forms such as books and television programs. You are not born with culture, but with the ability to acquire it by such means as observation, imitation and trial and error (Oswalt, 1986)

If culture can be learned, then a lot of it can be categorized as knowledge of the world. Duranti (1997) emphasizes this point by presupposing that language is learned. Hence other aspects of culture such as certain patterns of thoughts, ways of understanding the world, making inferences and predictions can also be learned. He broadens the definition of language by including customs, values, systems of beliefs, arts, knowledge and other habits practiced in culture, giving it a more holistic attribute. Thus, the communicative function of the language is to transmit the culture through generations. The definition by Linton (1945) incorporates the main functions of language: "culture is a configuration of learned behaviors and their results whose elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a given society" (Linton, 1945, p.32). Transmission of culture takes place through languages. To have a superior grip on a language, it is beneficial if an individual has an understanding of its cultural identity (Cohen, 1956). Also, in this particular definition, the word 'learned' indicates that a culture can be learned. The individuals have free access to it. They need only be ready to be the willing learners.

Ennaji (2005) argues that a culture's strength lies in assimilating other cultures into its own. A strong culture is one that accepts other cultures without much dogma, and it becomes weak if its norms and values are 'corrupted' by foreign cultures. Hence the higher tolerance will make a culture stronger. In Ennaji's (2005) opinion a foreign culture should follow the integration model of incorporation rather than the assimilation model of absorbing another culture into one's native culture. Other researchers argue that integration limits the capabilities of the foreign culture and halters harmony. However, Ennaji (2005) still concentrates on accepting the openness of culture.

Whether the end is to assimilate or integrate, when individuals inhabit a multicultural society, a need for tolerance arises. Tolerance can be defined in two distinct forms: the first is defined regarding adapting with the individuals around and the second, regarding moral values. Tolerance can have a negative connotation when it gives one individual the power to discriminate and look down on another individual. Here, the term tolerance shows the willingness of the dominant individual to 'tolerate' the differences in the other (Dusche, 2002). Additionally, the locus of power is in the first individual, as the latter is unaware of the discrimination. In other words, a foreigner is discriminated if the natives think that they are superior to any one who is not a native. The tolerance is positive if the foreigner is tolerated, as well as recognized and accepted as someone who is an integral part of the native's culture

(Dusche, 2002). In the words of Ennaji (2005), this can be successfully done through the process of both integration and assimilation.

There are occasions when tolerance enforces hierarchy (Brown, 2014). The base of this argument is Foucault's (1977) concept regarding governmentality, how a government produces citizens who will act to fulfill its policies (Sokhi-Bulley, 2014). These citizens will receive unchecked power over the rules and regulations of the society's functioning. Tolerance, in the context of governmentality, iterates the normalcy of the powerful. The deviance of the marginal discourses of tolerance inevitably acts on behalf of hegemonic social or political powers (Brown, 2014). Tolerance under governmentality would have control over the 'outsiders' both inside and outside a liberal nation (Gary, 2012). In such a scenario, tolerance has a negative connotation. However, Dusche (2002) clarifies that tolerance loses its negative connotation when the relationship between the citizen and the government is non-dominant and democratic rather than dominant and authoritarian.

As per a model that rejects governmentality, tolerance is not a product of hegemonic power (Gary, 2012). Its source lies with the public, who rule themselves with the aid of a democratic state. Hence the role of the state is to mediate, which in itself is limited. Essentially it is not the state that accepts different aspects of society but the civic society as a whole that tolerates its many differences. This is the point when tolerance becomes positive as now both, the foreigner and the native, together represent authority. In essence, they have equal power in hand, mutual respect, and recognition for each other.

Dusche (2002) places this in a very simple manner, saying that individuals meet each other in two different roles: one as a private individual and the other as a citizen. The citizen is morally obligated to accept the differences around him or her as it is a decree, established by a systematic authority. The citizen has essentially given up some of the freedom and has submitted to an authority which can protect the rights (Locke, 1689). Tolerance at this level is limited to co-existence. On the other hand, tolerance shared among private beings has more scope. It can go to the extent of revering and love. Hence, the role of a private individual underlines the limitlessness of tolerance.

Bringing these arguments together, cultural tolerance can be defined as the limitless recognition, acceptance and openness to the differences shared with diverse groups in terms of their beliefs, behavior and general conduct of life. The definition in itself needs to be studied and further investigated. It highlights the strong relationship between culture and language. As a consequence, there remains a research gap and the following questions have barely been investigated:

(1) Is the relationship between cultures and languages strong enough to promote general cultural tolerance?

(2) If one is exposed to many languages and therefore to cultures, is it possible for individuals to become more aware of cultural differences and similarities and hence become more tolerant?

Available literature is not strong enough for the development of a clear-cut answer to these queries. Especially when cultural tolerance is looked at from a more "limitless" perspective, no conclusive measure has been established for it as of now. Nevertheless, the efforts made in the recent years by researchers like Dewaele and Wei (2013) and Deardorff (2011), mark a significant attempt towards quantifying aspects of culture. More rigorous inquiries have to be attempted to make the concept more complete and accessible.

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