

Cultural Ecology and Linguistic Choices

Dr. Mona Mohammed Abbas Hamza

Hail University-Art College-English Language

Abstract: *The issue of culture and its relationship to language, in general, has been controversial for long time, and cultural ecology, as a new interest for researchers is a challenging issue in particular. With the up-rise of environmentalism, cultural ecology and its association with linguistic choices has been the focus point for such a great number of linguists in terms of how language is formed since it is profoundly affected by the surrounding environment. This paper is an attempt to probe the effect of ecological system on the general social trends of language and accents in the rural areas in particular. The objective of the study is to contribute my best to highlight the psychological and social effect on the verbal communication and how it is influenced by the environmental features governing the lifestyle of particular rural communities. The study is expected to contribute to the global efforts to shed the light on how communicative strategies are formed through the use of words genuinely related to ecology. The researcher has followed the analytical descriptive method.*

Keywords: Culture, Linguistic, Language

1. Introduction

Culture has profound effect on language; either everyday language, or formal one. It gives words special power, or shades beyond the ordinary meaning of each particular unit of a phrase or a word; influencing their use, and providing oriented context whenever we disclose everyday language of the folks. In the same way, Language supports the general trend of culture, promoting social bonds and allowing information to be shared and circulated. So, in this research we are trying to uncover by exploration and probing the relationship between language and culture in general, and the effects of cultural ecology on language, in particular. Cultural ecology in this context may thus be defined as an inventory of knowledge shared and reproduced by the use of interpretation patterns that has associated with the issue of environmentalism. Culture, as a value of human beings, is the sole identity to represent us as people living in a particular geographical area. It is formed by a lot of factors, most importantly is language. In addition to heritage, folklore, popular lyrics, songs, festivals, clothing etc. All of the aforesaid factors shape our minds and consciousness and instill values within us in different ways. While mixing up with people do play a great part in our lives, including the way we dress and our sense of living which is a reflection of our environment. Environment govern that governs the above mentioned factors. In this way, individuals, or society share definitions of what culture has brought to ecology itself, and vice versa; in other words, that new thinking about a new issue has emerged, which in this case, the issue of environmental challenges worldwide. In the field of linguistic studies, Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1916 -2001) has revolutionized linguistic thought when he introduced the ideas of the school of Structuralism on how mutual understanding by means of language is supposed to work. A considerable numbers of philosophers showed interest in his thoughts and later, they paved the way for cultural philosophy and the integration of culture into social theory of linguistics. However, the term of “cultural ecology” has been introduced later by a group of eco-critics who inter-related the new literary school of eco-criticism and its inter-relationship with culture in terms of ecological preservation and environmental studies, which in turn, linked to ecosystem and eco-feminist literary movement.

2. Significance of the Study

This research paper is an attempt to demonstrate the inter-relationship between cultural ecology and the general trend of communication forming the linguistic choices of rural communities, in particular, and their practices which are derived from the environmental surroundings, and how cultural ecology does govern the different uses of language. It has also been noted that the popular songs and folklore ballads and lyrics are considerably affected by the ecological features and nature components. The study has considered a number of different geographical areas and their linguistic characteristics in terms of their influence by the natural world. As language is a one a community's cultural component, so the “green” effect is obvious either in social bonds or everyday lifestyle.

3. Definition of Cultural Ecology

Culture is substantial and intrinsic to language. Language relates common experiences and backgrounds, and this background, in turn, creates words with specific connotations function as inseparable part of our culture. When a group of people, for instance, talk about a shared experience, a joke, for example, if it makes no sense to you, and you feel that you are excluded, this simply means that you do not share that particular experience in terms of its hidden or indirect meaning. This experience reflects the culture on meaning. Understanding the words without understanding the culture is definitely not enough for mutual comprehension amongst language users. As for ‘cultural ecology’, there extra emphasis on the issue of ecological awareness. Thus, language is not only words but also pronunciations, tone, and particular dialects. All of these parts of a language are shaped by culture. So, culture, in this way, is influenced by shared experiences, environment and history. In addition, that language is created and shaped by the needs of a culture as it changes. This means that language and culture exchange the role of shifting to reflect one another, and therefore, form the changing habits and experiences of people with the accordance of language maintenance and language change in a particular community.

3.1 Language and Nature

The natural world has been conducting a significant effect on language since the Stone Age and beyond. Linguistic studies have proven that one of the oldest languages, Ogham, was based upon nature, specifically trees and plantations. Each symbol not only can be translated as a letter, but also stands for a specific type of tree or a plant, with different references to different natural elements in which the trees have their fundamental notations. Ogham, for instance, is an old language that originated in Ireland, where nature was part and parcel of the pagan belief system of the culture of the Irish people. Native American language, for instance, also reflects nature; names of each particular society being based on certain natural elements. Eskimos and certain Native Americans from Northern Canada, as examples, have many words for snow, since snow is such a significant presence in their lives. It is undoubtedly, that man is the offshoot of the ecological surroundings in which he lives. Based on the above, cultural ecology is a translation of humans' knowledge and experiences merged together to form a complete eco-system of life.

3.2 Culture as knowledge vs. culture as values and beliefs

Another important factor influencing the conception of cultural influences may be viewed in the level of either culture as knowledge or culture as values and beliefs. In the first case, approaches see culture as a form of specific knowledge either on particular interaction contexts or on particular communicative rules or conventions. Members of a given cultural group are said to share this knowledge as their characteristic feature. Some approaches further specify this culture-specific knowledge as needed to deal with problems of social life that are universally given in all cultures. To enter a new group or to get acquainted with a group's culture, outsiders will need to learn and internalize this knowledge. Theories conceiving culture as beliefs or values underlying people's interaction instead see culture as a preferential system. According to this approach, members of a specific culture will prefer certain forms of action at the expense of other forms. Consequently, it may be assumed that on the one hand individuals of one culture indeed will prefer some forms of action, but that on the other hand they will always be able to act in alternative ways (AUERNHEIMER, 2002). Considering this last point, both conceptions significantly shape individuals' assumed scope of action.

Beyond this distinction, some anthropologists like Swidler (1986, 2001) hints at the shortcomings resulting from a separation of these two approaches to understand cultural influences on action. SWIDLER instead proposes to combine both approaches arguing that culture may be conceived as a repertoire of knowledge people may but do not necessarily have to make use of. On the basis of this deliberate choice individuals then will decide about how to interact—and theory may then take this interaction as influenced by culture. In this paper however, works using this approach will be put into the category of constructionist approaches

3.3 Cultural Ecology and Language

Cultural ecology as commonly defined is the study of how people's culture is adapted to their surrounding environment. The environment in turn, is a reflection of how people live in harmony with nature. This can be noted from the revelation of the tribes that still live in remote areas of civilization ; in the jungle, for instance, and find themselves, may be instinctively in charge of protecting the environment around them; in other words, these primitive communities have their own understanding and social concepts with relation to the state of being morally co-dependent and committed to exchanging relationships between environmental elements ; lower creatures, animals and plants in a natural organized harmony. In this regard, Anthropologist Julian Steward stated:“that the development of a culture is shaped by the biological and social properties of the environment“.

When he studied the North American Shoshone tribes and South American Indians by mapping their social organization, hierarchy, and ethnocentrism, he concluded that most of their language vocabularies are actually derived from natural elements of the same environment including sounds and gestures of the tribal languages. Roy Rappaport expanded on the theory proposed by Julian Steward by distinguishing between the known environment and the operational environment of a particular culture. He observed the rituals of Tsembaga Marring tribe of New Guinea, where they sacrificed pigs before the declaration of a war as a way of seeking blessings from their ancestors. This explains the social pressure as well as the religious aspects embedded within the culture. It also indicates the loyalty to the 'place'. The sense of the place strongly present in the details of the primitive tribes. Thus, the inter-related links between the general trend of lifestyle of a particular community and the sounds and denotations of the words of the language in use.

3.4 Accents and Dialect Related to Ecological Features:

As a culturally-based aspect of language, accents differ in each community within one country, and even territories within a number of countries. One can recognize someone's culture by listening to the speech patterns and accents he /she utters. However, it comes to be linked with remote located communities, those who live amongst natural elements, the linguistics trends are directly oriented to nature. In other words, you notice the sole and physics of minute details of natural elements in the language that the particular community is concerned with. For instance, in Sudan, a country that is located in Eastern Africa with inter-related cultural diversity. In the region of Butana in the east of Gazera region people are very known for their strong huddling of the traditional ways of expressing themselves with relation to the culture of Butana, they are inclined to popular poetry which is totally indulged in the details of nature. They have a kind of “epics” which are known as “Misdar” in which a poet describes his imagined journey from a particular place to the village of his beloved, in this spiritual journey most of the verse details are a kind of communication between him and nature with its ecological bio-diversity; the deer, the rabbits, the different types of plantations, the valleys, rivers and deserts. Most of the

linguistics choices the poet uses are derived from the environment, in both their reality and metaphor. You can find a word like deer, or “ a green branch” is used for “ a young beautiful girl”, a lion is used for a” brave man”, rain is used for “ grace “, “strong wind” or arid deserts for hardship, and so on. Here is a translation for one of those ‘misdars’ “

*The sun now is becoming dim,
And the hot days of summer have turned to be mild,
The lightning from “Minnah” drove the cold ozone,
I just eyed the falcon hitting the skylark.
The cute white –tailed deer
By now must have been in out –walk*

The poet in the above stanza symbolizes for different number of events by different number of ecological features.

The brown dim color of the sun is an indication of the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. The lighting is an indication of the rainy season. “Minnah” is a place located to the south of Butana area in Sudan. The view of the birds (the falcon and the skylark) also indicates the arrival of the immigrant birds, whereas the mention of the deer might be symbolized for a beautiful girl, the poet’s beloved. This simply means that each community develops its language features, both phonologically and morphologically from the surrounding environment.

Proverbs:

Proverbs in any language represent the experiences of a community that is stereographed in a very short saying. Thus, you can also recognize someone's culture in their vocabulary and dialect. For instance, in England a boot is the trunk of a car, while in America a boot is a shoe. And, of course, there is the age-old debate on whether a soft drink is soda or pop. Each language has evolved and created individual meanings for words due to their culture. So, culture is what makes a group of people unique. However, when it comes to associate with nature and ecological features, language turns to reflect natural elements as words, utterances and sounds. In some tribal areas in the Sudan, for instance, You can hear some words included in a proverb which are apparently irrelevant to the context of the sentence, yet it becomes of a special significance for a local inhabitant. We will take some examples from different cultures:

- Birds of feather flock together*(English)
Where the phrase “birds” can be used for similar category of humans, animals or birds.
- Fat is in the elder sheep* (Arabic), fat here is used to indicate ‘ grace’, where ‘fat’ is considered a useful nutrition in the ancient Arabic culture. Generally, the proverb means: older people are full of grace.
- He is like the shade of Dalaib tree*(Sudanese Arabic),
A Dalaib tree is a very high tree, it sends its shade far away from the plants growing underneath. So, the neighboring plants get nothing of its shade during a hot summer day. This is likened to a person whose relatives and friends do not benefit from being closed to him.

So our experiences within our various cultures shape how we behave with humanity at large and within our groups, changing how we speak. In rural communities it is notable that most of the focus of language words are related to

nature, agriculture, animals and so on. The proverb which says: “As a man sows so shall he reaps”, is obviously derived from an agricultural community, and can be found in many different communities worldwide in different forms with the same meaning.

3.5 Symbolism and Cultural Ecology

Most of symbolic use of a particular language is by a way or another relates to specific factors that influence the linguistic features governing the language patterns of denotation of the word meaning or meanings. Thus, in the case of the influence of the ecological effect on the speaking patterns of a particular community much of the focus goes to ‘ecology’ as a main source of the language. So symbolism in language usage becomes a part of the ways of expressing ideas in the language, and nobody misunderstands the final message of an utterance. Linguists notice that this phenomenon is mainly associated with communities living in remote areas where nature shapes a considerable part of the community’s lifestyle. Moreover, this distinction is usually found in communities where language is almost spoken rather than written. Among symbolic language practices is the use of colors, for instance.

Colors are employed in rural communities to indicate a great diversity of language uses. The colors of plants have diverse denotations in terms of the coming of the seasons, harvest and other important events that affect the life of the community. On the other hand, colors derived from nature might indicate ‘good sign’ or ‘bad omen’ in the tradition of some of the Sudanese tribes, for example, and particularly in Bahia region (remote tribal area).The color ‘green’, for instance is used in a verbal invocation for those who intend a long travel, with the belief that the ‘green’ is the path of the ‘good’. They will say:“Your way is green” to express hopes of good luck for the departing individuals. Whereas the color ‘white’ is uses worldwide to express joy and happiness in towns. The green color, in fact, is widely used in both verbal communication and every day practices to indicate ‘the good’. This notion is directly derived from the influence of nature on the society’s life. Their social and spiritual security is based on their closeness and trust of nature which represents the main source of their living.

4. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to highlight an overview of how language interacts with its environment, in other words, how actual linguistic choices and structures are formed, changed and influenced by different aspects of the bio-system in a particular environment. The main focus is on the effects the natural elements and ecological features that form the general trend of the linguistic structure. Structure that is not only shaped by how speakers interact with each other and with the world they live in, but also by external forces that are outside the control of individual speakers or speech communities. An orientation that is originated as a consequence to share very divergent assumptions on how, at what moment in a communicative process and with what effects ecological culture influences social interaction within a particular language or an accent. Recently, Shandell Mayor (2008) has summarized this phenomenon as related to the

field of cultural anthropology, accordingly, current studies in cultural anthropology “ may roughly be divided into pursuing two different traditions with opposing perspectives on their objects of research “. Hankers(1997, p.541) still tends to build upon ideas from cognitive anthropology initiated by Ward Good enough (1957) and today centrally purported by Roy G. D'Andre (1995). Based on the above, culture is seen as a system of mental knowledge shared by a cultural community, and enriched by environmental influence. Finally, cultural ecology can be seen as ‘values’ and ‘knowledge’ in the same time ; that the acquisition of a language with relation to the effect of different environmental factors shapes, in fact, new characteristics and unlimited derivative connotations to the cognitive context of the language.

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