am going to discuss the dichotomy between language and culture. Which one depends on which one? Or are they completely independent?

The culture of a group of people includes all of the systems, techniques and tools which make up their way of life. It is said that people from a different culture perceive a “different” world. So, culture modifies our mind?

About language, M. Saville Troike says that “language is a key component of culture. It is the primary medium for transmitting much of culture. Children learning their native language are learning their own culture.” Here we see that language is what depends on culture.

“The vocabulary of a language provides us with an interesting reflection of the culture of the people who speak it.” M. Saville Troike.

Many examples could be cited on this statement. For all is known that in the Skimo languages, there are many different words for describe the kind of snow and snowing, but not in other languages, but this does not mean that this phenomenon does not exist. Another example, speakers of different languages notice different things and so make different distinctions. For example, when Koreans say that one object joins another, they specify whether the objects touch tightly or loosely. English speakers, in contrast, say whether one object is in or on another. Saying ”I put the spoon cup” is not correct in either language. The spoon has to be "in" or "on" the cup in English, and has to be held tightly or loosely by the cup in Korean.

It should be clarified that the meaning of words is arbitrary and depends on the agreement of a group of speakers. People are who give meaning to words.

Discussing this point, we have to mention the Sapir-Worth Hypothesis. This has to do with the relation between language and the other aspects of culture.

“The hypothesis postulates that a particular language’s nature influences the habitual thought of its speakers. Different language patterns yield different patterns of thought. This idea challenges the possibility of representing the world perfectly with language, because it acknowledges that the mechanisms of any language condition the thoughts of its speaker community. The hypothesis emerged in strong and weak formulations.”

Language influences thought but we do not think that it influences as Sapir and Whorf explained in their theory, truth lies between the two things.
I have to say that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is not very well presented. For example, one can think against it all this:

- Thought existed before language. For instance, did the first humans did not think, even though they couldn’t speak a proper language as it is considered nowadays.
- Language is a way to express truth, but we can lie and express “our truth”.
- Language does not contain thought and culture but we believe culture does contain language, which is why different cultures exist in different countries with different languages although it is not a condition.
- All of us don’t see the world in the same way due to our physical perception, then every person thinks in a different way; however, Whorf still believes that everybody see the world in a similar way. This theory has to do with the individualist trend.

In the article Which comes first, language or thought? Babies think first, by William J. Cromie, we can see that he, based on Spelke, a professor of psychology at Harvard, argues that thought was first, so language does not depends on culture. Spelke suggest that language reduces sensitivity to thought distinctions not considered by the native language. "Because chimps and monkeys show similar expectations about objects, languages are probably built on concepts that evolved before humans did."

Because all of this, a great deal of cross-cultural misunderstanding occurs when the meanings of words in two languages are assumed to be the same. And this misunderstanding is added to negative stereotypes of other cultural groups.

M. Saville Troike is convinced that it would be completely impossible to separate language from culture. Cultural information is also necessary to understand a language.

As teachers, we can ask our educational system to make aspects of the dominant culture a meaningful part of the children’s experience without displacing or conflicting with their native cultures. Students must learn to respect and be able to deal with the culturally different backgrounds in the school.

Bibliografía

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