

Socio-cultural System of Communication: Imitation, Development and Limitations

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Abstract: A language learner understands the prevalent socio-cultural system of communication. A language continues to be a system in a circle with sounds and emotions. Knowing words also needs the understanding of the sentiments and the emotional appeal that they evoke according to the context. Sometimes words is used in one circle in the same language may not have the same effect in another circle. There is a great difference between one and the other with regard to the use of the language if the socio-cultural components are varied. This paper analyses the system and elucidates its connection with the sentiments and differences, without getting into which effective communication cannot take place. The present study also aims at unearthing the need to be involved emotionally into the expressions of a target language along with the awareness about the grammatical rudiments and vocabulary for effective communication, in the activity of language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language, Sentiment, Circle, System, Culture, Meaning

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I. INTRODUCTION

Language, as many theories state, might have started with the simple art of imitation or reproduction. In the same way, the learning of language in human life happens because of imitations and repetitions that come because of necessity (Nadel and Pez , 1993; Tomasello et al., 1993; Brown, 1996). It is unnecessary for anyone to have a language without the need. Learning and practicing a language, without people to speak to, is practically impossible. With the circulation that is available and with the content available in the circle, an individual creates a system with words, expressions and sentences approved by the system, to be in the circle. This circle that is available, within and among individuals make the prevailing content commanding and significant. The participants inside do not feel that there are expressions and words with varied significance available outside. They are more emotionally connected to words and expressions available in the circle and are not so with that which are outside. Furthermore, even if they come across components from outside without emotional appeal they become idle without a chance to be in practice and do not become a part of one's experience. This kind of narrow discourse curbs the entry of significant terms with significant thoughts into the system. This paper analyses the details of this system that remains as an issue for learners of any language to have a wide appeal with their communication. When they go out of the circle, there is almost nothing for them to communicate. This can be better explained with the words of Trenholm and Jensen, "If you've ever travelled to another country, you realize that what they do is often not what you do at home. People dress, move, and speak differently. They listen to different music, live in different kinds of shelters, and eat different food (374)." The present study aims at unearthing the need to be involved emotionally into the expressions of a target language than to be aware of the grammatical rudiments and vocabulary for effective communication and the ways and means to achieve the same.

Learning Language:

Lantolf, JP, one of the exponents in applied linguistics tries to probe into human mind and comes out stating that "Socio-cultural theory holds that specifically human forms of mental activity arise in the interactions we enter into with other members of our culture and with the specific experiences we have with the artefacts produced by our ancestors and by our contemporaries. Rather than dichotomising the mental and the social, the theory insists on a seamless and dialectic relationship between these two domains. In other words, not only does our mental activity determine the nature of our social world, but this world of human relationships and artefacts also determines to a large extent how we regulate our mental processes (Lantolf, 2000:79). So the term "experience" could not mean only something that comes to an individual as an observer. Today it could be the

outcome of others' influence, reading and also because of social media available for the people of the 21st century.

When it comes to language teaching, there come so many necessities like being an observant to what is going on in the classroom, observing developments and changes, attending to emergent wants, comparing accomplishments at one point in time with things that have happened before and what might have happened after, reinforcements and assessments. Crichton mentions that “evaluating activities and plans, developing and drawing on curriculums, and the host of other activities that contribute to effective teaching practice. Of course these activities do not happen in isolation; they inform each other through the lesson, the day, the week, and over the longer term, acknowledging the perspectives and changing needs of students, teachers and members of the broader school community”(Crichton, 2007:8). So the process starts with making the people believe that education in language means giving input, and after that, making the learners to manipulate what is learned and finally making them to be capable of using what is learned independently.

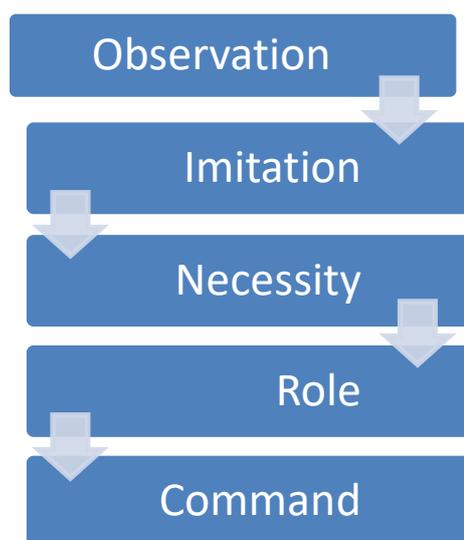


Figure 1: System of Communication Development

The picture above explains the general method of learning a language and development of a socio-cultural system. At the very beginning, it starts with an observation, which is followed by imitation. Whether it is a language or cultural attributes (content), these imitations are practised for accuracy. Later, what is learned is used based on the necessity and the achievements are validated. Then it is used by a person according to the role assumed. Finally, with continuous usage one gets the command in language.

It is worthwhile to state the definition for language here: “Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols (Edward Sapir, 1921).” This definition makes it clear that there are two different parts while using a language: the promoters of communication with the knowledge of the system and the production of communication. These two together make up a language complementing one another. The system with the content has its own limitations and development. There are various factors contributing to both. The following figure brings out the details of the same:

Promoters of Communication	Production of Communication
Experience	Information
Awareness	Self-confidence
Possibility	Practicality
Originality	Individuality

Table 1: Promoters and Production of Communication

Promoters of communication:

Through the term promoters of communication, it is attempted to mean some of the aspects that help to communicate effectively. The first of the aspects given here is experience. The word “experience” does not signify the number of years, but the amount of time that has been spent productively. It is because just knowing

how to speak will not sometimes stand sufficient, especially because of the differences that one has with the other from another part of the world. Trenholm and Jensen opines that ‘Sometimes it’s easy to see cultural differences. If these were the only differences to separate us, cross-cultural communication might not be so difficult. But there are other, more subtle differences that you can’t see from the windows of a tour bus, differences in the ways people within cultures view the world and their places in it. These differences make up a culture’s worldview, its orientation toward such things as God, humans, nature, the universe, and the other philosophical issues that are concerned with the concept of being’ (374).

Awareness about the situation and one’s content to participate also needs experience. Just like participation in a conversation, choosing an occasion is also essential. For that, experience and knowledge about the history of the subject becomes necessary. On the other hand, the extent to which the communication could be realistic from the point of view of the audience is also necessary. However realistic the communication is, if the concept is not original it will once again be something that is plagiarised without evoking any appeal to anyone.

Production of Communication:

The content for communication on the other hand has its own progression. It usually begins with gathering information about things. From there validation of the information becomes essential and the home work on the same could develop the components of self-confidence. Self-confidence may be the product of things having been understood suitably and the need for sharing with others arising out of it. Moreover, the most important attribute to initiate an indulgence in communication is the nature of the platform that is offered. This means, at least, there should be a slightest practicality of being listened by the audience. Finally, the desire to make a difference as an individual also comes in to play. Thus the production of communication itself is based on the developments listed in Table 1.

Circulation and Limitations:

Communication develops along with popular agreements and disagreements. David Hume, discussing on standards of taste, expresses this elegantly: “On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. It only marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind; and if that conformity did not really exist, the sentiment could never possibly have being”. (Hume 1757:268-9) To take away the sentiment attached to a word or a phrase is taking away the word itself. In the same way even sentences and phrases of a particular locality may evoke a particular feeling for which others may not react. The circle can be further narrowed for understanding to the level of a family or expanded to the level of a country or race. At various levels, the sentiment pertaining to the understanding of the meaning, do exist.

Language without the influence of the sentiments of the region does not exist. Every word or phrase has its own sentiment attached, surviving in spite of the changes that the time has done over. The meanings of words are feelings and they generate sentences. Teaching them to someone from another circle or culture poses the obvious challenges. Taking the words from one circle and linking to the feeling of another may help to achieve a similarity, but the accuracy cannot be guaranteed, if not done justice. Furthermore, even if the components are made familiar, the intensity of the emotion may not be achieved in the same way. When there is no experience behind to support, the sense and appeal are removed.

Teaching Language:

Teaching of a language today is also getting close to target culture or giving a new cultural platform for that language. Some have this different view, as Shivendra K Verma (1978) states that English, “...is used as a component of Indian culture to express a culturally determined network of activities that is typically Indian; in order to do this effectively it has to borrow words and expressions from Indian languages or to produce translation equivalents of these expressions. When people try to use a language to which they are not native, the opportunities for their first language to influence their second language are almost limitless. New words are certainly needed to identify things and processes for which there is no name in British or American culture”. It means that whether one goes to learn the language of the circle as they do or tries to give a new platform for the target language, the socio-cultural elements come into play.

Implications:

Language usage and learning need the understanding of cultural elements that evoke emotional attachments in a language. Learning of a language that starts with the components of production and promotion needs the socio-cultural elements, to know more about the way it operates as a system in a circle. Understanding a situation can happen only with the understanding of the cultural elements and the sentiments. Supplementing the cultural platform along with language learning will help to improve both the production and the promotion

of language. Working on these core issues will not only help us to understand the barriers of language learning but also develop efficiency in language communication.

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