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ETHNOLINGUISTICS- INTERRELATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

***Abstract.** This article explores ethnolinguistics in the framework of the correlation between linguistic theories and nonlinguistic phenomena such as culture. The study investigates the origins of ethnolinguistics as a linguistic term and its development into the basis for Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. This hypothesis has two main theories that became the foundation for a variety of research in the field of ethnolinguistics. They are: Linguistic Determinism and Linguistic Relativism. They both study the effect of the mother-tongue on an individual's perception of the world, but distinction is made based on the extent of the influence it has. Additionally, the paper analyzes the role of ethnolinguistic theories and the peculiarities of the language an individual uses in daily life in the formation of human behavior and viewpoint.*

***Keywords:** language, culture, linguistic, objects, definition, theory*

Introduction

The interest in understanding the concept of language had risen many-many years ago, we can say from ancient times. Most of the definitions of language were given by scholars of different science fields, such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and so on. Definitions of language vary depending on the methods used by the investigator, the aim of the study, the science field that the investigator's expertise lays at and the perspective of the investigator itself here are some definitions given by different scientists from different countries and professional fields [1].

The German philosopher hegel's definition of language stated that "language is the art of theoretical intelligence in its true sense, for its outward expression".

French linguist F. de Saussure said that language is a system of signs that can express ideas.

Aristotle believed that a word had a meaning by “convention” and that “words are mere symbols”. he was a representative of a materialistic point of view on the creation of language along with Democritus. Supporters of natural school, as plato and pythagoras, assumed that every word has a representation in nature. Even though these definitions bring out different aspects of language, most of the scholars agree on its social significance. Language should be studied in close connection with the social environment of people using it, since language reflects the mentality, character and social status of people who speak it. Sound system of a certain language can be understood correctly only if it is represented as symbols of cultural phenomena. Therefore, understanding the culture of a nation that uses this certain language is vital to understanding that language itself. There is a field of linguistics which studies the phenomena of interrelation of language and culture called ethnolinguistics.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, ethnolinguistics is a field of linguistic anthropology that discusses the relationship of culture and language and also how different ethnic groups perceive the world. It describes the lifestyles of different communities with respect to ways of their social interaction, more particularly language. Ethnolinguistics, also closed in on ‘cultural linguistics’, tries to answer several contentious questions: how do they interrelate? Does language shape culture or vice versa? How do language patterns affect human thinking processes?

Origin of Ethnolinguistics

Ethnolinguistics emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a result of ethnographic research that was carried out on Indian tribes of North and Central America. Scholars like L. h. Morgan, F. Boas, A. L. Kroeber, E. Sapir and B. Malinowski, approached this issue by studying and obtaining data from history of the social relations of primitive people, which made kinship terms one of the objects of ethnolinguistic studies [12].

In the middle of 20th century, the study of ethnolinguistics began to expand the fields it covers, starting with investigating other areas of lexicon such as levels of

language. Close connection between linguistic phenomena and cultural phenomena was established during the research of different scientists. At the end of the 20th century some scholars discovered the relationship between environment and linguistic diversity. For instance, D. Nettle [7] discovered that countries with low rainfall and short growing seasons sustain fewer languages by examining the global distribution of languages. Also, D. Harmon [4; 89-108] and W. J. Southerland [11; 276-279] shows that countries with high linguistic diversity have more plant species, and high bird and mammal diversity. All above mentioned scientists highlight the crucial role of geography in determining linguistic diversity. These statements led to further investigations which focused more on the relationship between language and culture.

The importance of solving the issue of symbolism in a language led to the cooperation of linguists and cultural anthropologists. Both sciences benefit from the solution of this problem. For example, for linguists, studying cultural phenomena may be a great contribution into providing a meaning for a word as a cultural definition. Linguists' profit from this cooperation is that studying symbolism may advance our comprehension of these cultural definitions [11, 276-279]. Consecutively, this statement suggests the existence of a structure or pattern in a language which concurs the concept of structural regularity which is basic in ethnological theory. Major shift in study of ethnolinguistics happened when the linguists of Circle of Prague identified the difference between "language" and "speech" implying the significance of "studying the systems in which the linguistic elements stand in mutual relation to one another" [10] as the "sound" is a physical element while "phoneme" is purely psychological. The distinction between "language" and "speech" is basic for understanding function and symbolism in language. This laid the foundation for applying the concept of structuring linguistic terms to nonlinguistic cultural forms. Sapir took over these concepts and developed them into the theory which concerns the problem of answering the question whether language shapes culture or vice versa.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis-states that native language defines people's perception of the world and determines how they think [2]. This theory was discussed by

Edward Sapir in 1929, yet it gained its popularity because of Benjamin Lee Whorf's writing on the subject. B. L. Whorf was Edward Sapir's student who popularized his ideas through articles and lectures, they were quite captivating for the audience since he was considered to be very charismatic as a speaker.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis divided into two theories:

1. *Linguistic Determinism* is divided into two determinism “strong” and “weak” .

Strong determinism describes that one's view of the world is believed to be defined strictly by language. An experiment regarding this theory was conducted by two Australian scientists, Peterson and Siegal, in which deaf children view a doll placing a marble in a box. After a doll is taken away, experimenters place a marble into a basket. Children are asked where they would look for a doll and a marble upon coming. Majority of deaf children with deaf parents guess that the doll will be in the box, which is the correct answer. Most of the deaf children with non-deaf parents gave incorrect answers. This experiment shows that children who grew up in an environment in which parents communicated with them with the help of complex sign language (American Sign Language) logically assumed that the doll would look at the place where she left the marble. Whereas children who grew up with non-deaf parents who are not fluent in ASL, were not able to think critically in this situation. To conclude the idea we can say the experiment supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Weak determinism refers to an idea that the influence of the language on one's world view is not as clear as in strong determinism, it does not define one's perception. Modern linguists agree more on the weak determinism theory and the strong determinism is gradually falling into disuse.

2. *Linguistic Relativity* is another division of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This theory can be defined by the statement that the structure of the language itself affects cognition and “there is no limit to the structural diversity of the language” [2]. There are several well-known experiments close to linguistic relativity. In 2003, linguists Lera Boroditsky, Lauren Schmidt and Webb Phillips carried out an experiment using German and Spanish native speakers, to show the influence of gendered languages on our cognitive processes [4]. The researchers showed Spanish and German

participants pictures of the same object and asked to describe the object. But the object was feminine in one language and masculine in the other language. Researchers discovered that depending on the gender of the object in particular language, participants tend to use male-oriented or female-oriented characteristics. For instance, in Spanish “moon”-*la luna*-is feminine, yet in German-*der Mond*-is masculine. Spanish speakers described the moon as “beautiful”, “dainty” and “nurturing”, while German speakers used such adjectives as “forceful”, “omnipotent” and “rugged”. The difference in qualities, or conceptualizations, of the same object, shows simply how language can shape us.

Another example of linguistic relativity can be given by comparing numbers and types of the basic color terminology in English and Tarahumara, language spoken by the Middle American Indian tribe. English language speakers distinguish between ‘blue’ and ‘green’. But the Tarahumara language has only one word “siy” name for blue and green. In that case, English speakers and Tarahumara speakers have different perceptions of the rainbow since according to English speakers there are both green and blue colors, and in Tarahumara there is only one word identifying both colors [8]. But what if we compare those languages to Kazakh language, which has different words meaning light blue, dark blue and green – ‘көгілдір’, ‘қара көк’ and ‘жасыл’ respectively. Then this case clearly demonstrates the Whorfian effect.

Although these experiments support Sapir-Whorf theory, there are some flaws related to it. Original Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that if a person's language has no word for a particular concept, then that person would not be able to understand that concept. But it is untrue now, language does not have control over human’s ability to have emotional response to something. German word ‘sturmfrei’ may be taken as an example of such flaw. ‘Sturmfrei’ describes “a feeling when you have the whole house to yourself because your parents or roommates are away” [7]. But absence of equivalence in other languages does not mean that speakers of those languages are unable to understand the concept.

Studying human behavior

Increasing attention for a person's individuality was followed by the developments in the study of personality as part of cultural anthropology. This field

of cultural anthropology makes attempts to demonstrate structuring and functioning of an individual as a whole in the relation to “culturally defined aims of his society” and verbal expressions are becoming more important [9]. This field is considered to be an intersection of linguistics and individual psychology. In this case, investigation of the manner of speech and personality of an individual, as well as specific morphemes analyzed within the utterance may point to patterns of non-verbal behavior in the culture. Linguistic analysis has displayed that morphemic sequences are in accord with the associated culture. Common use of terms entitling cultural objects indicates a readiness for their acceptance. Usually, the usage of such certain terms may denote the high status of the cultural element which this term indicates.

On the contrary, objects of common usage that are less referenced than others serving a similar function are probably undergone or in the process of cultural change. The word *chaucha*, a well-known Chilean term assigning a twenty-penny silver or copper coin, is less heard today than three or four years back, due to the fact that Chilean money has been liable to persistent devaluation. So, *pito* (for peso) or different words assigning this unit are heard more often, since it takes a peso today to purchase as much as would two or three *chauchas* somewhere in the range of three or four years ago.

The investigation of such changes may help to make predictions of future cultural shifts. Boas (1942) pointed out the importance of linguistic analysis as any linguistic structure is based on cultural change and vice versa. Additionally, he believed that not only material culture should undergo such analysis, but also nonmaterial culture. However, kinship systems may lack the corresponding terminology which points to historical changes or borrowings, or to present conflicts of attitude. Levi-Strauss proposed a special formula to analyze the kinship (brother/sister/father/son) structure [5]. And Emeneau made ethnolinguistic analysis based on folklore, funerals, salutations at ceremonies, and the like [6; 33-55]. Thanks to the data provided by the analysis of culture in relation to language made by such scientists as Baos, it becomes possible to trace the migrations through analysis of proper names in order to reconstruct the history of early years and it's

chronology. Examples of studies which are in line with this reasoning are to be found in the works of a number of linguists and anthropologists, among whom we can mention Boas, Sapir and Voegelin, with special reference to America. In this sense, dialect geography and diffusional areal studies have proved most valuable.

Conclusion

Ethnolinguistics is a field of linguistics that studies the relationship between culture and language. Its aim is to identify the relation between culture and language and find out whether language forms culture or on the contrary. Given the above, it can be concluded that the solution for this issue depends on the researcher's approach since there are different hypotheses addressing this problem. According to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis language defines or influences our thinking and view of the world. Additionally, this hypothesis implies that the structure of language itself may affect the mentality of people. Whereas other scientists believe that cultural changes lead to formation of language as it is. Investigating an individual's behavior and manner of speech may point to nonlinguistic cultural patterns as well as analyzing certain morphemes and the change of common lexicon is a vital instrument in predicting future culture changes. Ethnolinguistic is a very broad study which includes analysis of the linguistic environment with respect to the culture and race of people who speak this particular language. There are many more questions left unanswered.

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