



# THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: INSIGHTS FOR EDUCATORS

S.Santhiya

Asst. Professor, Department of English PRIST University, Thanjavur ,  
Tamilnadu, India

*Abstract:* Language and culture have a deeply interdependent relationship. Cultural contexts and value systems shape everything from how languages emerge to how they are taught and learned. Researchers have analyzed multiple facets of this complex dynamic in the field of intercultural communication. For language educators, understanding culture's significant impact can allow them to design more effective instruction tailored to students from diverse backgrounds.

*Key words:* culture, surrounding, language exposure.

## Introduction:

In a country where languages are widely spoken, learning English as a second language might challenge for certain individuals. This is especially true in India. Learner's language use reflects the interaction between English and other languages. Their usage of the target language demonstrates their socio-cultural ties. On different levels in education in India the targeted language ability to teach effectively has been impeded by socio-cultural influence and lubricated analogy-based English language learning in a multi-ethnic linguistic community by socio-linguistic variables. The circumstances have led to variations and incorrect English language acquisition among students.

English as a second language, it is a well-established fact that English continues to be the language of teaching at all levels of education in the nation and has solidified its position as a second language. This assumes that a typical Nigerian student would speak the language fluently. The reality, though, has been quite the opposite. English language proficiency is progressively declining every day. Bemoans Oluikpe the Nigerian writer says the proficiency level of English that recalls at all levels of our education system has become a matter of great concern to the educationists and education planners in Nigeria. By implication, an average Indian student still finds it extremely difficult learning English as it were. This challenge among other factors is unequivocally traced to human and material resources.

## Cognitive Processing and Learning Orientations

Analytical versus holistic thinking patterns differ across cultures and affect language acquisition. Students from cultures that emphasize rules, rigor, and compartmentalization like Germany and China have an easier time parsing the logic-based grammatical structures of languages. Learners from contextual cultures like Native American, Aboriginal, and Maori cultures grasp meanings more intuitively but need more bridging support for systematic rules. Knowledge of these general orientations helps balance teaching methods.

## **Prior Language Exposure**

Positive early experience with languages boosts confidence for future learning. Bilingual environments allow young children to absorb the natural cadences and sentence rhythms that later help grammar mastery and authentic pronunciation. Monolingual students initially struggle to listen past unfamiliar phonemes to decipher meanings. Building phonetic awareness and childhood language exposure accelerates progress in both native and secondary language attainment.

## **Motivations and Mindsets**

The perceived status of target languages cultivates different motivations. Students eager for global mobility view widely-spoken languages like English as socioeconomic assets, self-actualizing goals, thus stimulating higher proficiency. Negative colonial associations cause resentment that hinders engagement for other student groups. Portraying linguistic diversity as equally valuable addresses inequities while still highlighting pragmatic benefits.

## **Communication Styles**

Culture also determines appropriate conversational patterns. Whether discourse patterns are elaborated versus succinct, their rhythms and tones carry cultural flavor. Similarly, norms governing confrontation, directness, emotional expression vary across regions. Teachers specifically explaining situational variations in politeness conventions and degrees of formality can reveal a language's versatility. In essence, the cultures students represent fundamentally shape all facets of their language learning trajectory—their cognitive functioning, motivations, communication instincts and more. Employing a culturally responsive pedagogy means not just addressing literacy levels, but embracing languages as cultural artifacts themselves. Doing so enables transformative instruction.

## **The Influence of Cultural Factors on Language Learning**

It is often said that learning a new language opens the door not just to communicating with people from a different cultural background, but also to understanding their worldview. Culture and language have a profoundly intertwined relationship, whereby cultural norms, values, customs, and histories shape linguistic development. Cultural factors equally impact how successful students are at acquiring new languages. Educators need an awareness of these intercultural dynamics that affect the language learning process.

One cultural factor that has been shown to influence language learning is the degree to which a student's native culture emphasizes skills like analysis, memory, and deduction over more creative skills. Students from cultures that prioritize rule-based learning and rigorously structured education systems often excel at grammar acquisition and written language. On the other hand, students from cultures fostering imaginative expression, open-ended inquiry, and verbal dexterity demonstrate strengths in intuitive grasping of meanings, narrative writing, and conversational fluency. Teachers can incorporate activities tailored to both learning orientations.

Additionally, the cultural attitude towards target languages impacts achievement levels. Students who see English as a gateway to global opportunities and advancement demonstrate higher motivation levels compared to peers who resent its dominance as a linguistic imposition leftover from colonial regimes. Positive cultural portrayals also help, like the association of French with sophistication. Similarly, the target language community's openness towards those speaking it as a second language shapes confidence. Understanding these sociocultural perspectives that color students' mindsets can help educators encourage an engaged learning process.

Cultural differences in communication styles also come into play. For instance, some cultures prefer an indirect approach prioritizing modesty and courtesy while others value directness and speaking one's mind. Students accustomed to the former style may find blunt, confrontational expressions in Western languages surprising. Teachers can bridge this gap by exposing students to situational variations in politeness conventions and tonality. Ultimately, cultural conditioning leaves ingrained fingerprints on language skills development in diverse ways.

### Some more detailed notes expanding on the impact of cultural factors on language learning:

Cognitive Processing Differences, Analytical vs holistic thinking patterns, Analytical cultures favor structured, rule-based learning, Learn grammar structures easily, Strong at reading, writing Holistic cultures intuit meanings as a whole, Interpret based on context ,Strong at conversation, dialogue ,Implications for teaching, Incorporate analytical drills & exercises, Use stories, scenarios for context, Explicitly bridge grammar rules to conversational usage.

Bilingual environments, Absorb rhythms, intonations, accents, Builds phonetic awareness, Allows experimentation without self-consciousness, Monolingual upbringing, Adult learners struggle with sounds, Self-consciousness hinders fluency, Pedagogical implications, Phonetic instruction, listening drills, Speaking practice without corrections, Positive reinforcement to build confidence.

Integrative motivation, Language as means for assimilating culturally, Develop deeper bonds with native speakers, Instrumental motivation, Language as practical skill for career/social mobility, Colonial histories color perceptions, Postcolonial resentment towards imperial languages, Admiration for dominant global languages, Implications, Highlight universal value despite checkered histories, Recognize both integrative and instrumental goals,

### Communication Variations:

- Direct vs indirect speech norms
- Bluntness vs courtesy protocols
- Confrontational vs conflict-avoidant cultures
- Elaborate vs succinct discourse patterns
- Situational formalities, politeness conventions
- Implications
- Explicit contrast of norms
- Scaffold to bridge communication styles

Non-native English speakers can face several challenges while learning English due to differences between English and their native languages:

**Grammar challenges** - Languages have structural differences in grammar like sentence syntax, verb tenses, use of prepositions etc. For e.g. English has strict word order in sentences unlike Hindi. This can cause difficulty. Learners tend to literally translate rules from native grammar.

**Pronunciation and intonation** - Each language has unique rhythms, stress patterns and phonetic ranges. Non-native speakers often transfer accent and tones from their first language resulting in non-native pronunciation of English words. Certain English sounds like 'th' may be absent in their languages.

**Vocabulary and idioms** - Translating idioms literally makes no sense due to cultural differences. And multiple words exist in English to describe subtle shades of meaning. Building vocabulary takes time. Prior literacy can help transfer reading comprehension skills.

**Listening comprehension** - People speak faster than written text. Understanding different English accents/dialects without visual cues poses a real challenge for learners. Distinguishing words in continuous speech stream is difficult at first.

**Socio-cultural norms** - Languages evolve in cultural contexts. So pragmatics like etiquette rules, nonverbal communication, polite vs casual registers etc differs across cultures shaping language use. Learners may be unaware of situational variations.

However with exposure, learners gradually tune their ears to English speech. Teachers focus on high frequency phrases, vocabulary reinforcement, pronunciation drills, listening exercises and situational dialogues to help smooth common hurdles based on first language influence. Support and encouragement also aids progress. There can be some key differences between the English language usage and proficiency levels of government school students compared to private city schools:

**Vocabulary:** City school students generally have a larger English vocabulary and use more complex words and sentences. Government schools often teach students using vernacular languages, limiting English exposure.

**Fluency:** City school students have greater English fluency, using appropriate tenses, accurate grammar, and clearer pronunciation. Government school students may have more halting speech, use code-switching, mix tenses or use literal translations.

**Accent:** City school students develop more native-like accent through audiovisual aids, language labs and native speakers. Government school students struggle with pronunciation of alien sounds. Regional accents are stronger.

**Communication Skills:** Presentation skills, public speaking confidence, conversational abilities get more focus in city schools. Government schools tailor learning towards curriculum requirements and assessments.

**Exposure:** City students participate more in debates, group discussions, and extra-curricular activities improving communication. Government schools rarely offer immersive, interactive platforms to apply language skills.

While many government school students from non-English speaking backgrounds master fluency, city school graduates have an edge with English-literate environments at home and school. But increased digital resources are bridging gaps. Ultimately all students need an encouraging stage for enunciating ideas without feeling conscious about perfect diction or grammar.

Government education policy should thus fund more English teaching resources in state schools while also making students proud of their diverse home languages and cultural identity. Greater language diversity on campuses helps integration too.

Here are some suggested solutions to help bridge the gaps in English proficiency between government and private city school students:

**Invest in language labs:** Government schools need more audiovisual aids and multimedia language labs for listening, speaking, and pronunciation practice to strengthen English skills.

**Focus on functional English:** The curriculum should cover practical, everyday conversational English and vocabulary alongside formal grammar instruction to improve fluency.

**Teacher training programs:** Specialized training in TESOL methodologies, phonetic instruction and activity-based teaching should be provided to government school English teachers.

**Customized materials:** Textbooks and learning materials with local contexts, bilingual explanations and more representation of vernacular tongues will aid comprehension.

**Group work and discussions:** Government schools need to create more opportunities and platforms for peer collaboration, public speaking, debates and impromptu interactions in English.

**Audiovisual content:** Integrating locally-made films, songs and entertainment content alongside global English media can stimulate interests.

**Language exposure trips:** City school exchange programs and language immersion rural teaching camps should involve government school students too for motivation.

**Bridge digital divide:** Improving tech infrastructure and access to online dictionaries, learning apps, games etc. facilitates self-paced learning.

### **Conclusion:**

Implementation requires public-private partnerships between schools, localized teacher communities sharing best practices and educationists tailoring global knowledge to suit local needs. The solutions should focus both on students gaining competence for academic and career opportunities, as well as feeling confident as multilingual citizens representing India's diversity. In conclusion, cultural backgrounds mold everything from cognitive processing to attitudinal mindsets that determine how students master new languages. Appreciating these intercultural dynamics allows educators to adopt more culturally responsive methods. The most effective language instruction recognizes that as much as languages symbolize cultures, they are also shaped in foundational ways by cultural contexts.

## References

- Almusharraf, N. M., & Khahro, S. (2020). English Language Teaching in the Age of COVID-19: Engagement and Motivation in Online and Blended Learning. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(5), 254.
- Basal, A. (2015). The implementation of a flipped classroom in foreign language teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 16(4), 28-37.
- Burston, J. (2015). Twenty years of MALL project implementation: A meta-analysis of learning outcomes. *ReCALL*, 27(1), 4-20.
- Chen, H. R. (2020). Using virtual reality to support English language learning: A systematic review. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-13.
- Crystal, D. (2012). *English as a global language*. Cambridge university press.
- Ferreira Cabrera, A. (2021). Revisiting Mobile-Assisted Language Learning: Using Duolingo in the Spanish Classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*.

