

Language and Culture

Lesson One- Master -1
Semester two

What is Culture?

- ***Culture*** is the entire way of life for a group of people (including both material and symbolic elements).
- It is a lens through which one views the world and is passed from one generation to the next.
- It is what makes us human.
- “Cultural knowledge is “socially acquired”. We learn all necessary behaviors that are part of that knowledge. It is a “knowhow” necessary to fulfill social requirements” (Wardhaugh, 1998)
- “Culture is “knowledge” which is shared and negotiated between people, belonging to all of them”

Definitions of culture:

Cultures as product and practice

- A particular form, stage, or type of intellectual development or civilization in a society; a society or group characterized by its distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, etc. **The Oxford English Dictionary (2000)**
- Mind is actually **internalized** culture. Culture is not **innate** but learned behaviour. **Hall (1969)**
- The cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. **Samovar and Porter (1994)**
- Culture can be thought of as ‘Big C’ culture—history, geography, institutions, literature, art, music, and the way of life, and ‘Little c’ culture—culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions expressed mainly through language, but also behaviour including; beliefs, values, customs and habits. Much of this is unconscious. **Tomalin and Stempleski (1993)**

Definition: Culture and language

- **Culture** is much more than food, or singing and dancing, or traditional costumes...it refers to a set of ‘agreements’ among a group of people, determining how they will behave, how they like to present themselves, how they communicate, what they feel is important, how they see themselves and how they see the world. In short, it is their way of being.
- Our world and our culture are built by the language that we speak. “the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group” **Sapir – Whorf Hypothesis, (1939)**
- **Language is a semiotic system** (a system of symbols) that express the culture and society that we live in. The relationship between language, culture and society is interrelated; language influences culture and culture influences language. Language as a social semiotic means, “interpreting language within a sociocultural context, in which culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms.” **Halliday, (1979)**

Culture Definition and scope

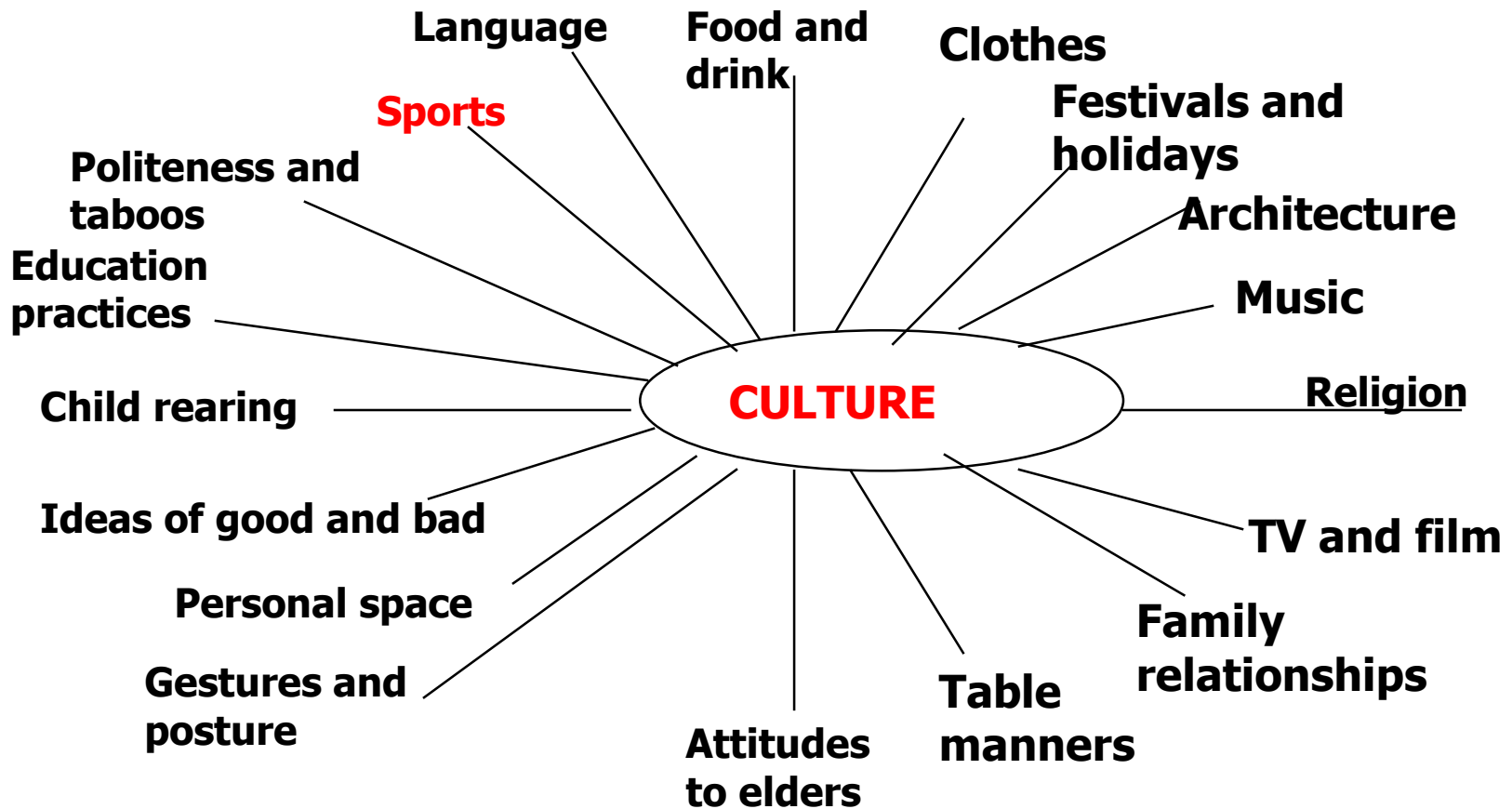
- **Culture** is a **lens** through which we view the world around us. It is also a filter that we are (mostly) unaware modifies our perception of reality. Culture is transmitted to us from our ancestors and we recreate it through interaction with other people. Hence, it is **not something static** as suggested by its classification and use as a noun, but rather dynamic, “Culture is a verb”. Street, (1993)
- “Culture **is not something fixed** and frozen as the traditionalists would have us believe, but a process of constant struggle as cultures interact with each other and are affected by economic, political and social factors.” (Sarup, 1996: 140)

What makes up culture?

- Sociologists see culture as consisting of two different categories: ***material culture*** (any physical object to which we give social meaning) and ***symbolic culture*** (the ideas associated with a cultural group).

Definitions of culture:

A selection of elements of culture



Culture and discourse

- Culture is
- “ Membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting .” Kramsch (1998: 127)
- “Culture is associated with civilization, and culture and civilization refer to the whole way of life of a foreign country included but not limited to its production in the arts, philosophy, and “high culture” in general”. (Byram, 1989)
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Material Culture



- Material culture includes the objects associated with a cultural group, such as tools, machines, utensils, buildings, and artwork.



Symbolic Culture

- Symbolic culture includes ways of thinking (beliefs, values, and assumptions) and ways of behaving (norms, interactions, and communication).



Components of Culture



- One of the most important functions of symbolic culture is it allows us to communicate through signs, gestures, and language.
- **Signs** (or symbols), such as a traffic signal or product logo, are used to meaningfully represent something else. **Gestures** are the signs that we make with our body, such as hand gestures and facial expressions; it is important that these gestures also carry meaning. Finally **language**, a system of communication using vocal sounds, gestures, and written symbols, is probably the most significant component of culture because it allows us to communicate.
- Language is so important that many have argued that it shapes not only our communication but our perceptions of how we see things as well.

Components of Culture: Language

- The *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, which is the idea that language structures thought, and that ways of looking at the world are embedded in language, supports this premise.
- Ex: snow, jam, *Family Guy*



Language

- *Homo sapiens* is the only animal capable of speech.
- Language makes it possible for people to communicate and think about abstract concepts.
- Social learning by which children acquire culture would be impossible without language.
- Language allows us to communicate about past, present and future events. Language facilitates culture
- Cheese + hamburger = cheeseburger
- Lettuce + hamburger \neq lettuceburger

Properties of Language

- **Arbitrariness:** The meaning of each individual word is arbitrary.
- **Productivity:** A finite number of words can be combined into an infinite number of sentences.
- **Displacement:** Language makes it possible to communicate about people, things and events that are not present.
- **Multimedia potential:** Language can be transmitted through a variety of media.
- **Discreteness:** Language is made up of discrete elements.

Grammar

The knowledge shared by those who speak and understand a language:

- Sounds
 - Rules for combining them
 - Meanings that are conveyed
 - How sentences are constructed
- Total system of linguistic knowledge that allows the speakers of a language to send meaningful messages and hearers to understand them.
 - **Dialect** - A regional or subcultural variant of languages.

Sound Systems

- **Phonology** :Sounds of a language and how they occur in patterns.
- **Phonemes** :Sounds that speakers of a language recognize as distinct from other sounds.
- **Lexicon** :The total words in a language.
- **Morphology** :The study of the units of meaning in language.
- **morpheme** : The sequence of phonemes that carries meaning. free morpheme and bound

Social Uses of Speech

- To speak appropriately, people must take the **total context** into account.
- They must know the **various situations**, or social scenes, of their culture.
- People must recognize the **kinds of interactions** they are expected to have with others.

Components of Culture

- **Values**, shared beliefs about what a group considers worthwhile or desirable, guide the creation of **norms**, the formal and informal rules regarding what kinds of behavior are acceptable and appropriate within a culture.
- **Norms** govern our behavior. Norms are specific to a culture, time period, and situation. Norms can be either formal, such as a **law** or the rules for playing soccer, or informal, which are not written down and are unspoken.

Components of Culture: Norms

- Types of norms can also be distinguished by the strictness with which they are enforced.
- **A folkway** is a loosely enforced norm that involves common customs, practices, or procedures that ensure smooth social interaction and acceptance.
- **A more** (more-ray) is a norm that carries greater moral significance, is closely related to the core values of a group, and often involves severe repercussions for violators.
- **A taboo** is a norm engrained so deeply that even thinking about violating it evokes strong feelings of disgust, horror, or revulsion for most people.

Social Control and Sanctions

- **Sanctions** are positive or negative reactions to the ways that people follow or disobey norms, including rewards for conformity and punishments for norm violators.
- Sanctions help to establish **social control**, the formal and informal mechanisms used to increase conformity to values and norms and thus increase social cohesion.

Ways of looking at Cultures

- ***Ethnocentrism*** is the principle of using one's own culture as a standard by which to evaluate another group or individual, leading to the view that cultures other than one's own are abnormal.

Who wants a snack?
Cicadas,
grasshoppers,
and other insects
on skewers
for sale in Night
Market in Beijing,
China.



Ways of looking at Cultures

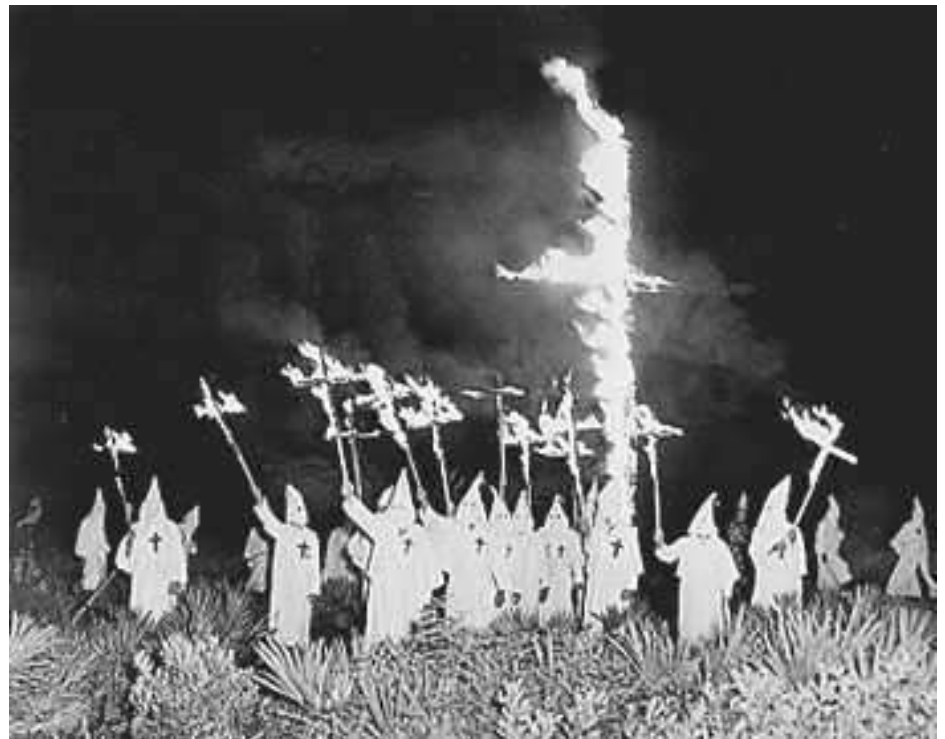
- ***Cultural relativism*** is the principle of understanding other cultures on their own terms, rather than judging according to one's own culture.
- When studying any group, it is important to try to employ cultural relativism because it helps sociologists see others more objectively.

Variations in Culture

- ***Multiculturalism*** values diverse racial, ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds and so encourages the retention of cultural differences within society. The ***dominant culture*** refers to the values, norms, and practices of the group within society that is most powerful in terms of wealth, prestige, status, and influence.
- A ***subculture*** is a group within society that is differentiated by its distinctive values, norms, and lifestyle.

Variations in Culture (cont'd)

- A *counterculture* is a group within society that openly rejects and/or actively opposes society's values and norms.



Cultural Change

- Cultures usually change slowly and incrementally, though change can also happen in rapid and dramatic ways.
- One of the key ways that material culture can change is through ***technology***.
- Cultural change can also occur through ***cultural diffusion***, which is when different groups share their material and nonmaterial culture with each other.
- ***Cultural leveling*** occurs when cultures that were once distinct become increasingly similar to one another.

Cultural Change (cont'd)

- ***Cultural imperialism*** is the imposition of one culture's beliefs, practices, and artifacts on another culture through mass media and consumer products.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

- *Language is “the principal means” of communication in our everyday life. People belonging to the same society share common knowledge and common experience. When they communicate they refer to that knowledge and they can express their personal opinions, beliefs, and point of view.*
- (1) Language is a part of culture and must be approached with the same attitudes that govern our approach to culture as a whole.
- (2) Language conveys culture so that the language teacher is also of necessity a teacher of culture.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

- Language symbolizes cultural reality. *Language has itself a cultural value for its speakers. It is seen as an aspect of their “social identity”. They identify themselves and others through the use of language.*
- **High culture** refers to those forms of culture usually associated with the elite or dominant classes.
- **Popular culture** refers to the forms of cultural expression usually associated with the masses, consumer good, and consumer products.

TEACHING CULTURE V.s TEACHING LANGUAGE

“LANGUAGE IS THE GLUE THAT BINDS A GROUP OF PEOPLE TOGETHER”, (BROWN, 1987) – THE MOST OBVIOUS MARKER OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

After the World War II the idea of teaching culture through teaching language was strengthened together with the development and influence of anthropology. This was particularly strong in America where the American Committee on language and culture expressed the following:

Lesson Quiz

1. A student who tries to objectively analyze the food that the people of a different culture eat is using:
 - a. ethnocentrism.
 - b. ethnography.
 - c. cultural relativism.
 - d. cultural spotting.
2. According to our discussion, what is the most significant component of culture?
 - a. Norms
 - b. food
 - c. language
 - d. values

Lesson Quiz

3. The spread of McDonald's restaurants throughout Asia is an example of:
- a. technological determinism.
 - b. cultural diffusion.
 - c. cultural leveling.
 - d. cultural imperialism.
4. The imposition of one culture's beliefs, practices, and artifacts on another culture through mass media and consumer products is called:
- a. cultural imperialism.
 - b. cultural leveling.
 - c. cultural diffusion.
 - d. cultural determinism.

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Thank you for
your attention



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