

Reflection Paper 1: What is Culture and With Language?

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ASL 4050: Advanced Deaf History

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August 23, 2024

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Before detailing the complexity between interwoven culture and language, Kramersch defines each concept individually. Language is defined as a naturally derived system of symbols used by a group of people, while culture is nurtured by experiences and used to apply language. Therefore, as language is used to communicate experiences, define identity, and express cultural reality by connecting these aspects to one another, language and culture cannot be separated.

Kramersch also emphasizes the impact of several layers of community within a culture and the language they are rooted in. For example, although everyone is born with the innate ability to express language, the ability to apply language appropriately is dependent on culture through socialization. This also applies to the acquisition and application of written language in a way acceptable to the current environment. Therefore, culture allows individuals to express their beliefs, values, and identity through language, but it also enforces cultural conventions that users must navigate and adhere to. In addition, the norms of appropriate behavior depend on the community of language users as not only are their speech communities that use the same linguistic code but there are also discourse communities in which members adapt their use of a mutual linguistic code to match their social needs. Ultimately, with each communication layer, culture dictates how language is used in grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of a language, but also in the topics discussed, style information is presented in, and socialization that occurs simultaneously.

I found the application of the contradicting language acquisition nature vs. nurture debate to be most interesting in Kramersch's chapter as it is a consistent and controversial discussion within society. However, instead of separating the two processes, Kramersch describes that nature

and nurture, language and culture, cannot be mutually exclusive. The ability to possess language means nothing if no social opportunity exists to express it, and the ability to share a common language means nothing if there is no community to socialize. Therefore, what is natural can only be realized through nurture, and language can only achieve its communicative potential through socialization provided by culture.

Similarly, I appreciated the complexity of Kramsch's discussion that defined culture as both a liberating and constraining vessel. Although culture provides structure and organization that allows people to ascend, it also confines their beliefs, choices, and social behavior to what is deemed socially acceptable. This identification is compounded in that people naturally affiliate themselves with the communities and environments that surround them. Therefore, institutions founded by these common values only reinforce the mindset and identity of the group. While this can be argued to strengthen a community, it also creates a larger disparity between cultures that may possess different beliefs or values. Ultimately, this may encourage hostility between cultures, perpetuate ignorance, and prevent the recognition of differing perspectives. It is important to acknowledge this complexity as many issues impacting society today are unknowingly and institutionally reinforced due to the desire to promote conformity within culture.