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THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM

by

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Colonial and post-colonial systems of education in Africa have often been criticized for creating a sense of inferiority concerning both their language and their culture in the minds of young Africans who undergo formal schooling (1). Although programs of education have substantially changed in many African countries that have become independent, one factor has remained constant throughout colonial and post-colonial days - the use of a non-African language as the medium of instruction in, at least, the secondary stage of schooling. This factor implies another - the introduction of the language of instruction as a school subject at an early stage and the continued teaching of it to a high level of proficiency. It is therefore useful to consider the role that a second language can play in the cultural development of independent African nations. The topic is too vast to be handled either comprehensively or in great detail in a paper of this length. I cannot hope to do more than suggest certain points that should be taken into consideration when making a decision concerning the amount and kind of cultural content that should enter into a second language program (2). I propose to begin by briefly examining the nature of the link between language and culture and then to consider the connection between the cultural content and the aims of a second language program. I shall conclude by pointing out one of the psychological aspects of a bi-lingual and bi-cultural educational program.

Language and Culture

For the purposes of this paper the term second language will refer to a language that has been developed in a cultural background considerably different from that of the student's first language or mother tongue. The question immediately arises as to whether a choice of cultural content is possible when teaching such a language. Is not the link between language and culture so close that the very fact of teaching a language implies teaching some elements of the culture of the native speakers of that language? If so, what are those elements? Are they such as to alter the personality of the pupil in certain ways? For instance, does the teaching of French or English to an African student

tend to make him think or act like a Frenchman or an English-
man or, if this has occurred in the past, was it due to un-
necessary cultural adjuncts that were, consciously or uncon-
sciously, attached to the language programs? This is a ques-
tion of great moment when English and French are being look-
ed upon more and more as languages of international communi-
cation between Africans who, nonetheless, are more anxious
than ever to retain and develop their own culture.

In his article on "Linguistic and Cultural Change,"
Harry Hoijer quotes Edward Tylor's well-known definition of
culture as "that *complex whole* which includes knowledge,
beliefs, arts, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities
and habits acquired by man as a member of society." One may
ask what this leaves out. It is not surprising that Hoijer
adds, "It is clear that language is a part of culture: it
is one of the many 'capabilities acquired by man as a member
of society.'" (3) It may be worth pointing out, however,
that the 'complex whole' is not a Platonic ideal but a use-
ful *abstraction* which not so much 'includes' as 'reflects'
the sum total of knowledge, beliefs, etc. of a society.
Whereas the word 'culture' neatly summarizes the different
attainments of society, the use of that word must not be
allowed by a mental trick to forge links that are not in-
herently there between those separate attainments. For in-
stance, the link between a people's art and legal system
may lie so remotely in the past as to be no longer operative
or even discernible (4). The teaching of the present-day
legal system to another society would not, therefore facil-
itate an understanding of the art attached to that culture
nor would the teaching of the philosophy in which both
systems originated be guaranteed to give rise to similar
legal and art systems in the new society. The synchronic
link between the various aspects of a highly comples culture
are often tenuous. Language, however, is not merely an
aspect or a part of a culture. It is the medium through
which the knowledge, beliefs and emotions of society are
expressed. Language must therefore be a fairly adequate
tool to express every aspect of culture. Moreover, a parti-
cular language must adequately express the particular cul-
ture of a given society. If not, the society would either
reject or change the language. It would sharpen its tool.

Given this link between a language and a culture, must
we go further and claim that a language can only express
the culture of its native speakers and that it cannot ade-
quately express the culture of another society? On the one
hand we can point to the fact that language is never static,

that it continually changes to adapt itself to the cultural change of the society. If it can do this historically within society can it not do so across societies and cultures? On the other hand, this same phenomenon of linguistic change can be viewed as a constant, gradual tool-refining process that makes a language even more uniquely the possession of its native speakers. Which is the correct interpretation?

Adaptability of Language

To answer that question it is necessary to consider which aspects of language change through time. It is evident that the lexicon is most affected. Words are added as need arises both by creation and by borrowing. The former process is an easily observable occurrence as new commercial products are put on the market with coined names, *e.g.*, Fab, Ajax, etc. These new creations always obey the phonological and morphological rules of the language for which they have been created and borrowings are typically transformed to fit the pattern of the language into which they are borrowed. This occurs to such an extent that the source of borrowing is no longer recognized (5). The meanings of words also change. An Englishman's reference to carriages would not nowadays conjure up a picture of horse-drawn vehicles unless it were made in an historical context. It would probably be taken to denote railway carriages. Likewise, the common form of farewell used in England today would no longer be looked upon as a blessing. 'Goodbye' is not even recognized as a lexified form of 'God be with ye.' The import of the words is lost as is that of the American greeting 'Hi' derived from 'How are you?' Only the situational context remains. There is, of course, no reason why changes of this kind cannot occur synchronically within a language used across cultures. In such cases borrowings would come into this cross-cultural language from the first languages of the other cultures. This has already occurred to a certain extent through English communities living abroad. The Indian word 'pakka' and the Swahili word 'safari' are already universally accepted as part of standard English to express concepts which could not adequately be expressed by the English words 'correct' and 'journey.' Other words are more localized (for example, *mabati, matoki*), as are coined expressions such as 'up-country' (away from the city) and 'hit the tar' (arrive at that part where the dirt road becomes paved).

Change and extension of meaning can also apply geographically to incorporate new situations. An example of this is

the use of the word 'tour' by colonial officers who referred
to a two-year working period between home leaves as a 'tour.'
It is clear from these examples that the same mechanisms that
have been applied historically within a society can apply
synchronically to counteract the very strong link that lies
between the vocabulary of a language and the culture of its
native speakers when this language is used to express an-
other culture. The difference lies in the fact that the
diachronic (historical) process is gradual whereas the
synchronic must be fast and needs to be, in most instances,
artificially imposed. This entails a large amount of bor-
rowing and coining of words and a considerable amount of
extension of meaning to such an extent that a language that
is adapted to another culture will quickly develop into a
new dialect. Such new dialects have arisen in Australia,
the United States, India and many other parts of the world.

The Impact of Culture on Language

So far, I have examined only the vocabulary. Yet the
vocabulary has in recent years been looked upon by language
teachers as the most superficial aspect of language while
emphasis has been placed on the sentence patterns of syntax.
This view goes back to linguists as early as Sapir who
wrote, "The linguistic student should never make the mistake
of identifying the language with its dictionary." (6) How-
ever, there does not seem to be a clear division between
syntax and lexicon. Nominalizations and compound words and
adjectives are the result of grammatical processes, the
last two arising from relative clauses and the first from
whole sentences. Certain linguists also believe that
'simple' names of objects represent semantic structures that
are as complex as compound sentences. Whether this is cor-
rect or not, there is no doubt that complementation, rela-
tivization, nominalization, compounding, adjective and adverb
formation together with lexification are so many forms of
shorthand. All languages share these grammatical and lex-
ical processes and it is the selective use of these processes
in any given language that is connected with the culture of
its speakers. For example, English has compounds such as
bookcase, suitcase, blackboard, and cupboard that would need
paraphrasing in languages attached to cultures in which
these articles are not readily available. On the other
hand, the numerous words for bananas in Bantu languages need
to be expressed in English by such paraphrases as 'the fing-
er-sized yellow banana eaten raw; the large red banana
eaten raw; the large green banana cooked whole; the large
green banana cooked for mashing, used for drawing beer' etc.
By analogy with the terms 'eating apple' or 'cooking apple'

one could reduce the relative clauses to compounds and abbreviate the unwieldy phrases, *e.g.*, 'large green mashing bananas,' 'beer bananas,' etc. Nonetheless, with size and color mentioned for differentiation, the English paraphrase would amount to four words. The alternative would be either to create new terms or to borrow one set of local names. A similar problem occurs with kinship terms. In Bantu culture it seems necessary to distinguish between uncles and aunts on the mother's side and those on the father's. The English phrases 'my paternal uncle' and 'my maternal uncle' are unwieldy for frequent use. Is one to coin the words 'muncle' and 'funcle'; 'maunt' and 'faunt'? The possibilities are there. They have simply not been exploited because British culture is peculiarly uninterested in such details of kinship.

On the other hand, in some Bantu languages, the same term is used for one's sister as for one's father's daughters by other wives. Is the English word 'sister' to be used in this wider sense in cultures where differentiation between 'sister' and 'half-sister' would seem unnatural and unkind? In some of these languages the same term is also used to include one's female cousins, at least on the father's side and all women whose kinship entails strict prohibition of marriage and a strong claim to protection. This sense of kinship is, in English, best expressed by the term 'sister.' It is not surprising that the term is currently used in East Africa in this wider sense (7).

To summarize, the mechanisms for abbreviating speech exist in all languages, but they are differentially applied according to the needs of the culture that the language has been developed to express. The structure of a language is not, as such, intrinsically connected with any given culture, but the application of language mechanisms that lexicalize morpheme sequences and that catagorize lexical items is not only language specific but also culture specific. In other words, the fact that a language uses word order and prepositions instead of case inflections to express subject and object, dative and benefactive, etc., as in English and Latin, does not seem to be connected with the culture attached to the language. Neither does the fact that one language uses verbal affixes to express a causative and another does not (8). But the lexicalization of the phrase 'cause to become not alive' (that is, to kill), together with the absence of a single lexical item for the phrase 'cause to become not obnoxious' is no doubt of c ultural significance. Perhaps this lexicalization is due to the fact that more specific means have been found of causing others to be 'not alive' than

of causing them to be 'not obnoxious.' Bantu has a noun class prefix system which, by now, is of small cultural significance, but which earlier was highly significant when the system clearly categorized nouns into classes of humans, animals, plants, fruits, inanimates, masses, liquids, small objects, elongated objects, etc. An interesting view into cultural development is given by the fact that the class for humans evolved as linguistically distinct from the class for animals at a comparatively late stage of Proto-Bantu. This may have reflected an emergent homo-centric outlook on the part of the speakers of proto-Bantu. However, one must beware of making facile cultural deductions from semantic data. For instance, it would be falacious to conclude that Bantu cultures take little account of the distinction between men and women simply because gender distinctions do not occur in either the pronominal or verbal systems of Bantu languages. In fact, no culture could make clearer distinctions concerning work, position and the sphere of action allotted to men and women. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that, even in the realm of semantics, there is a direct relationship between a language and the culture of its native speakers.

One reason is that language is used to express various modes of truth - the scientific, the observational, the poetic. Another is that linguistic change lags behind cultural change. Yet again, re-semantization makes a change in verbal expression unnecessary. For instance, English speakers still say "the sun rises in the East." There is no doubt that long ago this utterance was considered to be scientifically accurate. Now it is well known that this is observationally accurate, but scientifically inaccurate since the sun's appearing to rise is the result of the earth's rotation. It would be naive for a man from Mars to deduce that the present day speaker was no further advanced than his predecessors in his 'beliefs' concerning the planets. Similarly the use of the phrase 'he learned it by heart' should not mislead an observer to assume that Englishmen believe that man's learning processes lie in the heart. Linguists say that the English language has no future tense since the future can only be referred to by use of an auxiliary which, on its own, has a separate meaning. However, an observer hearing the phrase 'the bucket will fall' must not deduce that English speakers are animists who adduce voluntary acts to inanimate objects. Nor should he think that they have no sense of future time since the language has no future tense. It is evident that the word 'will', used as an auxiliary, has been resemanticized to include the feature (+ Future) and exclude the feature (- voluntary). In this context it no longer means to 'want'. Numerous instances of this type give rise to serious misgivings concerning the Sapir-

Whorf hypothesis so neatly summarized in the much-quoted words, "Human beings...are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society....We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation" (8).

It may be that the reverse is true. Culture has a way of imposing interpretation on language. This is apparent when we see the use of the same language in different sub-cultures. The word 'square' has quite a different meaning on the lips of a teen-ager at the drug store than on those of his teacher in geometry. Similarly, the tourist who has 'had a bad trip' does not refer to the same thing as the drug addict who uses that phrase. The same can be said of such over-worked terms as democracy, freedom, love, etc. The only way of discovering the meaning of such terms is to discover something about the speaker. 'Democracy' in a socialist state does not mean the same as 'democracy' in a capitalist state, etc. The words take on a different content according to the cultural context and the content can be changed at will to such an extent that only an insignificant or peripheral aspect of the original remains. For example, any English speaker could make a fair guess at the meaning of 'main line' in most contexts, but who, innocent of the dope world, would guess that a 'mainliner' is a drug addict who injects heroin directly into the blood-stream? Who but a Cockney would understand the phrase 'apples and pears' to refer to stairs, and 'trouble and strife' to a wife, and how many Americans would interpret a 'waltzing Matilda' to be, not a 'dancing doll' but a blanket roll to an Australian of the outback? If the same words and phrases can have such different interpretations in different sub-cultures, there should be no fear that their use will impose a particular cultural pattern on learners of the language. Rather should it be feared that the cultural pattern of the learner will impose its interpretation on the new language. That is, in fact, a most persuasive and subtle source of interference that has rarely been discussed in literature dealing with contrastive analysis and which would be impossible to handle systematically at this stage given the little that is known concerning the semantic component of any language.

Interference of this kind is most easily, if also most trivially, illustrated with reference to concrete objects. An African learning such English nouns as 'house' or 'well' or 'garden' will base his concepts on the houses, wells and gardens that he has seen which may bear no resemblance to those referred to by the Englishman using these words. Professor

Martinet once said that, despite his efforts he could not
bring himself to call an American town hall a 'mairie' even
if he were speaking French when referring to it. The two were
different entities even though they served a somewhat similar
function in the two societies (9). This reticence is under-
standable on the part of a speaker who is conversant with both
cultures. If, however, French were but one of fifty differ-
ent languages in France, and French schoolboys had to learn
English to communicate inter-regionally, they would use the
word 'town hall' to refer to their 'mairie' and would prob-
ably be blissfully unaware of the fact that an American town
hall was quite a different thing, performing a partially
different set of social functions and bearing a different
social atmosphere. At a greater level of abstraction the
term 'democratic' can be used by many African children to
describe adequately a system of rule based on the meeting of
village elders long before the children have looked into the
complexities and intricacies of a modern democratic state,
and without in any way imposing a British as opposed to an
American or Russian view of democracy. If such views are
imposed that are not inherent in the culture of the learner,
they will not be so much imposed by the new language as by
the text-book author or the teacher of this language who may,
himself, either belong to another culture or be strongly
influenced by that other culture. In other words, it is
quite possible for an Indian culture or a Chinese culture to
be taught to Africans through the medium of English. This
is not to deny, of course, that the best medium for the
learning of Chinese culture would be Chinese, just as the
best medium for learning an African culture would be the
African language used by the speakers of that culture.

Deictics of Language

One element of language that must be considered in this
discussion is the deictic categories. These are much more
intricately bound up with syntax than most other areas of
semantics. Fillmore writes:

> *Deixis is the name given to those aspects of language
> whose interpretation is relative to the occasion of
> utterance, the time of utterance, and to times before
> and after the time of utterance; to the location of
> the speaker at the time of utterance; and to the
> identity of the speaker and the intended audience.
> An extended theory of deixis would take in several
> other aspects of the speaker's spatial, temporal
> social orientation.* (10)

This aspect of language figured greatly in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of the 'world view' of the speaker of a particular language. There is no doubt that deictic categories differ from language to language, yet it is difficult to see exactly where such categories tie in with culture, except for some rather superficial reflections of social attitudes as is shown, for instance, in the use of special terms of respect for particular persons. I use the term superficial with reference to these, not because the respect thereby expressed is a superficial aspect of culture, but because its particular mode of expression through a grammatical category is quite arbitrary. For example, the Spanish child can express respect for an elder by the use of the second person plural; a Ugandan child may do so by kneeling in the presence of the elder; and an American child by addressing him as 'sir'. Differences in spatio-temporal categories cannot be annulled so easily. A language with two categories of place deixis (*i.e.*, near speaker - away from speaker) would have to reorganize its spatial outlook to express a third medial category as do Spanish and Japanese, or as did Middle English with its term 'yonder'. It is not clear whether these categories affect or reflect the 'world view' of the speaker, nor to what extent they and the 'world view'interact. Nor is it clear what part this spatio-temporal 'world view' plays in the non-linguistic aspects of the speaker's culture. Opinions have been expressed that claim such a 'world view' to have repercussions in every sphere of culture, but no more is actually known than is expressed in the moderate statement of Whorf:

> *Whether such a civilization as ours (western and technical) would be possible with a widely different linguistic handling of time is a large question - in our civilization, our linguistic patterns and the fitting of our behavior to the temporal order are what they are, and they are in accord.*

An interesting additional note to the above quote tones down the extreme claim seen in the first quote from Sapir, *i.e.*, that man's thinking is *limited* by his language, for Whorf goes on to say,

> *Science is beginning to find that there is something in the cosmos that is not in accord with the concepts (of time) we have formed....It is trying to frame a New Language by which to adjust itself to a wider universe (i.e., the universe of relativity)."* (11)

This 'new language' is therefore the expression of new concepts formed in opposition to "the language habits of our community."

It would seem that the mind of man transcends the limitations of his language.

From the point of view of language teaching, there is no doubt that the spatio-temporal categories of a language cannot be excluded from the program in the way that irrelevant "meanings" of lexical items can be, and insofar as these introduce a new 'world view' to the learner, the learner is perforce being introduced to the 'culture' of the second language (as much as this spatio-temporal 'world view' and the 'culture' are inter-related). In theory, this is unavoidable. In practice, however, it would be interesting to discover how far and in what ways English spatio-temporal categories prevent a Bantu culture, for instance, from being expressed. In any case, such categories do not, *ipso facto*, impose political, social, economic and aesthetic cultural concepts of the English-speaking world, though they might predispose the learner to a better grasp of these if and when presented to him at a later stage.

The Second Language Program

If the broader cultural concepts do not form an intrinsic and inseparable part of language, what then should be the cultural content of a second language program? This, of course, depends on the reasons for which the language is taught. The term 'second' language is generally used to denote a language which learners will sooner or later need to use as a tool in their everyday life. This term is used in opposition to 'foreign' language, which is usually acquired as a cultural asset. Obviously the program of a 'foreign' language will be heavily weighted with the culture of the native speakers of the language. Such a language is learned with a view to reading its literature or, in the case of 'exotic' languages, to entering into contact with a culture that is totally different from one's own. A *second* language, however, is one that will be needed as a medium of communication and possibly instruction in one's native land. The amount of 'foreign' culture and of 'local' culture that should enter into the teaching program of a second language must therefore be carefully considered according to the aims of each section of the program.

For instance, primary school children in Uganda learn English in order
    a) To receive instruction in English in the higher classes of the school;
    b) To enable them to communicate with members of other tribes who speak different languages;

c) To play their part in the civic affairs of their country where administrative business is conducted in English. For none of these functions will the pupils of primary schools need to learn about British or American culture, but they will need to be able to converse in English about both inter-tribal and national affairs. The primary school English program should, consequently, concern itself entirely with 'local' culture, the meaning of which term I will unravel later. At the other end of the scale, a student of literature at the university level cannot 'get by' on modern African literature in English. He will perforce study the great classics, but his teacher must bear in mind the fact that the student will need to have the background to this literature filled in, in terms of cultural content, in the same way in which a British student needs to be given background to American literature before he can grasp its significance.

What about the secondary school student who stands between these two extremes? Is it necessary for him to study something of British culture? If not, can such study be avoided? The answer to the first question once again depends on the aim of the language program which, in turn, depends on both government policy and the economic lev el of the country. Will the product of the secondary school normally be placed in an influential position in which he will be expected to have personal contact with the outside world? Is the policy of the country such that it has much greater contact with English-speaking countries than with others? If so, the secondary school student may well be introduced to the cultures of these countries. If, however, there are now sufficient university graduates to fill such influential posts, there is no need for the secondary school programs to be particularly biased toward British culture just because the medium of instruction in the school is English.

Nonetheless, another factor enters here which may render necessary a large amount of incidental study of British culture. This factor lies not in the language but in the textbooks used as a medium of instruction. Texts written for a certain reader take for granted a body of experience that is common to both author and reader. Text and reference books written for British readers take many aspects of Brtiish culture for granted. This is more readily apparent in literary works, but is nonetheless evident in all but the most scientific prose. Metaphor is one way, analogy another, and mere absence of detail a third way in which a writer will rely upon a common cultural background. The comparison of an historical event to a more recent event known only to British readers; an example of a geographical

physical feature drawn from the geography of England rather
than that of Africa; assumptions made concerning the behavior-
al reactions and customs of the British - all these cultural
implications that fill the texts and reference books in African
secondary schools wither leave the student in a perpetually
uncomprehending state or force him to absorb large doses of
British culture. Texts and reference books in all school
subjects could theoretically be written that teach the same
content, but without reference to British culture. But, al-
though this is feasible for the primary school at the present
stage when primary school libraries contain only a small number
of books, the task for the secondary school would be wholly
impracticable. It seems, therefore, that the secondary school
student will, incidentally, have to learn much about British
culture.

Should the English language teaching program attempt to
help the student to read his subject texts by giving systematic
information about British culture or should it, on the contrary,
balance the incidental aquisition of British culture by placing
greater emphasis on national and local culture? It would seem
that texts for the English program are always the first to be
written specifically for local consumption. It would, therefore,
be possible for these to reflect local culture - even in the
secondary school. I will not attempt to answer the question
beyond pointing out that much research is needed to discover
how students could be helped to better understand the cultur-
ally weighted reference and library books that they need to
read in such large quantities.

English Medium Primary School

To return to the primary school, I would like to consider
a plea that has recently been made for English medium instruc-
tion from the start in Uganda (12). This already exists in
many schools in Kenya. From the point of view of culture, two
questions must be asked. Do we wish to exclude the 'home' cul-
ture from the school? If not, is English adequate as a 'sole'
medium of the home culture? I suggest that unless we wish to
see the rapid disintegration of African cultures within a few
generations it would be unwise to exclude the 'home' culture
from the school. Schooling is the only means to the 'modern'
more comfortable way of life that appeals to everyone. The
school therefore stands in high repute. If the home culture is
excluded from the school it will be relegated to an inferior
status in the minds of the pupils avid for all the convenience
and wealth enjoyed by the 'educated'. The only way to show
that the home culture is honored is to give it a respectable
standing in school.

Can this be done in English? At this stage I must define
my terms. I have referred to national culture and to home cul-
ture. This dual appellation is intended to reflect the fact
that there is no such thing as a single Ugandan culture or a
single Kenyan culture. What, in fact, exists are on the one
hand, a variety of well established 'tribal' cultures that have
already been profoundly affected by the impact of Christianity
and Islam, and are being affected ever more rapidly by that of
material progress and, to a smaller extent, by formal school-
ing. These are the cultures that I refer to as the 'home'
culture of the pupil. On the other hand, there is an urban
way of life that has developed from the impact of different
tribal cultures upon one another when mixed in the towns, and
from their adaptation to modern technology in an urban environ-
ment. This adaptation includes a certain amount of 'borrowing'
from what could be termed the 'universal urban culture' that
spreads its fads and fashions throughout the cities of the
world. The national culture is, in fact, a culture of the
future - a culture that will arise from all the elements men-
tioned above - a culture that is now in the process of forma-
tion and that can be, to a certain extent, guided by government
policy and instruction in the schools. I have also used the
term 'local' culture when referring to both the home and the
national cultures in contrast to the foreign culture of the
second language. I shall now use another term - 'rural' cul-
ture - to refer to that which the 'home' cultures share in
common.

Now we may return to the question stated earlier. Can
the home cultures of African children be adequately taught in
English? The answer is no. Each home culture has its own foods,
its own dances, its own customs and ceremonies. To transliter-
ate or create English words for all of these would be quite a
task. However, it could be done, or alternately, the original
names could be retained in the same way in which the Mexican
food names taco, tortilla, etc. have been absorbed into North
American English. What could not be translated are the numer-
ous idioms, proverbs and wise sayings that depend upon a play on
words. The same is true of heroic poems or even prose stories
that depend greatly upon alliteration, reduplication and the
use of ideophones for effect. The totally untranslatable aspect
of the culture, however, would be the deictic categories that
were mentioned earlier. These categories are shared by lan-
guages of the same group but, in a country like Uganda, where
languages of different groups are spoken, the aspects of home
cultures that are shared by all cannot include those categories.
English may be able to express the rural culture in which the
dances, foods, etc. of individual groups can be referred to in
general terms, but specific training in any of the tribal cul-

tures can only adequately be done by the language of the tribe
itself or at most of a tribe whose language is closely related
and whose culture is not greatly at variance. The home language
should not, ideally, be excluded from the school.

Bilingual Education

Given bilingual education in primary schools, a question
arises concerning which aspects of the national culture should
be included in the English program and which in the vernacular.
Should English only deal with the urban culture, for which it
is best suited by reason of its technological terminology,
leaving the home language to express both the home and the more
general rural cultures? If this solution causes the least
linguistic effort on the part of language program compilers it
is, at the same time, fraught with danger - the danger being
similar to that inherent in total neglect of the home culture.
If home and rural cultures are associated only with the home
language while the inviting, new urban life is associated only
with English, both home and rural cultures and language will
be relegated to an inferior status connected with early child-
hood. This is all the more striking in a system where English
takes over completely at a fairly early stage of the child's
education. It is less evident in a system where the rural
culture could continue to be presented right through second-
ary school in an African language not too far removed from the
home language, as is the case with Swahili in Tanzania. In the
former case, therefore, English should be used to express the
rural culture as well as the urban, while the vernacular would
rise in stature if it were used to express aspects of urban as
well as of rural life. This shows the need for compilers of
both language programs to work together in order to produce a
combined course in which the two programs complement without
duplicating one another.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that language and culture are
inherently connected only in that area which reflects spatio-
temporal and perhaps causal relationships; that a language can
therefore be adapted to express another culture and that it
need not impose upon the learner the wider cultural aspects of
its native speakers; that a language, however, is best suited
to express such a culture in that its metaphors, idioms, pro-
verbs, and other literary devices specifically refer to the
native culture, but that nonetheless the greater part of cul-
ture that is incidentally taught with a language is due more
to the link between the teacher (or textbook writer) and his
culture than to the link between the language and its culture.

It is therfore theoretically possible to teach English without
exposing the learners of the language to the culture of its
native speakers and this possibility can be realized where few
books and only local teachers are used for instruction. However,
as soon as a more liberal education is granted to the pupils,
with the use of a large library and of expatriate teachers or
'local' teachers who have had contacts with the other cultures,
exclusion of the culture connected with the language of instruc-
tion becomes impracticable. This fact must be squarely faced
when planning a second language teaching program in the second-
ary school. A decision must be taken as to whether this pro-
gram should aim at facilitating an understanding of the 'second'
culture or should, on the contrary, counterbalance the impact
of this culture. It may be possible for it to do both. With
reference to the literature course, P.J. Roe of Tanzania has
written, "the student must also be trained to respond to what
he reads and to consider the problems *in the light of his own
environment and society.*" (13) This is true of everything the
student reads - including those elements of 'human' culture
that have universal application as well as those that are
specific to the 'second' culture. A second language program is
probably the best place in which this consideration of other
cultures in the light of the learner's own culture can take
place. For this to be possible, however, it is necessary that
the student be helped to develop a more mature understanding
of his own culture through courses of oral and written litera-
ture in some of the major local languages.

Footnotes

1. An eloquent reiteration of this accusation is to be found
   in Talmy Givon's article in *Ufahamu*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Winter,
   1971).
2. This may be the place to point out that, as far as I know,
   no such overall decision has ever been made outside the
   Eastern bloc. Compilers of textbooks have made their own
   decision concerning the content, both cultural and linguist-
   ic, of their course and texts for use were, in the past,
   selected more for their linguistic content and methodol-
   ogical approach than for their cultural or ideological con-
   tent.
3. Harry Hoijer, "Linguistic and Cultural Change," in Dell
   Hymes, ed., *Language and Culture*, (1964), p. 455.
4. In earlier societies the complex 'whole' forms a more

compact 'whole' in which the parts are more closely inter-
related. In many societies, for instance, art and law are
connected to one another via beliefs. As Sapir observes,
"The sharp distinction between religious and other modes
of conduct to which we are accustomed in modern life is by
no means possible on more primitive levels. Religion is
neither ethics nor science nor art, but it tends to be
inextricably bound up with all three." (Sapir, *Culture,
Language and Personality*, p. 136). An instance of this
in more developed societies can be found in the creation
of geometric designs in Hebrew and Moslem art as a result
of the injunction against idols.

5. There are several 'levels' of borrowing reflecting differ-
ent stages of assimilation. W.H. Whiteley, "Loanwords in
Linguistic Description: A Case Study from Tanzania," in
I. Rauch and C.T. Scotten, eds., *Approaches in Linguistic
Methodology*, (1967), gives an excellent systematic pre-
sentation of these with reference to Swahili.

6. Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of
Speech*, (1949), p. 219.

7. This is not altogether different from English. Goodenough
writes, "In response to the question 'Is he your brother?'
ego cannot say 'No, he is my half-brother' (*i.e.* not my
brother but some other kind of relative) but can only say
'Yes' or 'Yes, he is my half-brother.' By way of contrast
it is possible to answer the question 'Is he your brother?'
by saying 'No, he is my stepbrother.'" (W.H. Goodenough,
"Yankee kinship Terminology: A Problem in Componential
Analysis, " in *American Anthropologist*, Part 2, Vol. 67,
No. 5 (October, 1965).

8. E. Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, Daniel G.
Mandelbaum, ed., (1961), p. 69.

9. In a lecture at UCLA.

10. Charles Fillmore, "Deictic Categories in the Semantics of
'Come,'" in *Foundations of Language*, 2(1966), pp. 219-227.

11. B.L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, John B. Carroll,
ed., (1956), p. 154.

12. Sam Mugalasi in "P Ladefoged, *et. al.*, Language Teaching in
Uganda: Its Implications for Language Teaching in Uganda,"
Unpubl. paper for English 270K, UCLA, Winter, 1971.

13. P.J. Roe, "The Teaching of Literature in Tanzanian Schools,"
in J.P. Gorman, ed. *Language in Education in East Africa*,
(1970). Italics mine.

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