Sapir & Whorf's Socio-Cultural Tradition

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf as major proponents of the theory. The theory is hinged on the idea that cultural aspects are manifest in language and thus communication; and to them, communication can never be understood in isolation, that culture should be part and parcel in the endeavor.

Keywords: | Sapir, socio-cultural traditions, cultural communication

Sapir and Whorf are the proponents of social cultural tradition component "linguistic relativity" which holds that the structure of a language affects the ways in which its respective speakers conceptualize their world, i.e. their world view, or otherwise influences their cognitive processes. The theory is popularly known as the 'Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis'. And Kennison (2013) posits that the hypothesis is guided by two principles: Strong and weak versions whereby strong version assumes that language determines thought and that linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories. Weak version: that linguistic categories and usage influence thought and certain kinds of non-linguistic behaviour.

Sapir's Background. To understand the reasoning behind Sapir's development and involvement, his historical circumstances played a key role. He was born in German Pomerania; Sapir's parents migrated to America when he was a child. Casasanto (2008) He studied Germanic linguistics at Columbia, where he came under the influence of Franz Boas who inspired him to work on Native American languages.

With his solid linguistic background, Sapir became the one student of Boas to develop most completely the relationship between linguistics and anthropology. Lee (1996), Sapir studied the ways in which language and culture influence each other, and he was interested in the relation between linguistic differences, and differences in cultural world views. This part of his thinking was developed by his student Benjamin Lee Whorf into the principle of linguistic relativity or the "Sapir-Whorf" hypothesis. D'Andrade (1995 argues that in anthropology Sapir is known as an early proponent of the importance of psychology to anthropology, maintaining that studying the nature of relationships between different individual personalities is import ant for the ways in which culture and society develop.

Sapir's anthropological thought has been described as isolated within the field of anthropology in his own days. Carrol (1986) argues that instead of searching for the ways in which culture influences human behavior, Sapir was interested in understanding how cultural patterns themselves were shaped by the composition of individual personalities that make up a society. This made Sapir cultivate an interest in individual psychology and his view of culture was more psychological than many of his contemporaries.

Darnel (1990) suggested that there is a close relation between Sapir's literary interests and his anthropological thought. His literary theory saw individual aesthetic sensibilities and creativity to interact with learned cultural traditions to produce unique and new poetic forms, echoing the way that he also saw individuals and cultural patterns to dialectically influence each other.

The main tenet in social cultural tradition is that; language has a setting and that the people that speak it belong to a race (or a number of races), that is, to a group which is set off by physical characteristics from other groups. In other words, communication occurs only when people are involved and they must be in context. Again, language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives.

Leavitt (2011) however argues that, anthropologists have been in the habit of studying man under the three rubrics of race, language, and culture. One of the first things they do with a natural area like Africa or the South Seas is to map it out from this threefold point of view.

In social cultural traditions, it is believed that actual communication between individual carries with it elements of culture. Cultural practice generally refers to the manifestation of a culture or sub-culture, especially in regard to the traditional and customary practices of a particular ethnic or other cultural group. In the broadest sense, this term can apply to any person manifesting any aspect of any culture at any time.

However, in practical usage it commonly refers to the traditional practices developed within specific ethnic cultures, especially those aspects of culture that have been practiced since ancient times. Examples of cultural practice likely to be manifest in language through communication include; religious and spiritual practices, medical treatment practices, forms of artistic expression, dietary preferences and culinary practices, cultural institutions, as well as gender roles,(including household relationships) among others. Like I pointed earlier in this paper, anthropologists have been in the habit of

studying man under the three rubrics of race, language, and culture. This in essence is an attempt to group persons on the basis of their cultural background to aid in understanding them or whatever they are looking for in them as well as the environment they are in.

Sapir (1921) "An in the introduction to the Study of Speech" argues that the man in the street does not stop to analyze his position in the general scheme of humanity. "He" feels that he is a representative of some strongly integrated portion of humanity. This is the point at which the thought of "nationality" comes in and that everything that pertains to him is viewed as a typical representative of the of this large group.

Relevance of Sapir's views in communication. It is obvious that for the building up of society, its units and subdivisions, and the understandings which prevail between its members some processes of communication are needed. Selingman (1951) posits, while we often speak of society as though it were a static structure defined by tradition, it is, in the more intimate sense, nothing of the kind, but a highly intricate network of partial or complete understandings between the members of organizational units of every degree of size and complexity, ranging from a pair of lovers or a family to a league of nations or that ever increasing portion of humanity which can be reached by the press through all its transnational ramifications.

Therefore, It is only apparently a static sum of social institutions; actually it is being reanimated or creatively reaffirmed from day to day by particular acts of a communicative nature which obtain among individuals participating in it. So that Jubilee or ODM etc. as a party cannot be said to exist as such but only to the extent that its tradition (culture) is being constantly added to and upheld by such simple acts of communication about its activities.

One may conveniently distinguish between certain fundamental techniques, or primary processes, which are communicative in character and certain secondary techniques which facilitate the process of communication. However, Seligman is quick to point that, the distinction is perhaps of no great psychological importance but has a very real historical and

sociological significance, inasmuch as the fundamental processes are common to all mankind, while the secondary techniques emerge only at relatively sophisticated levels of civilization. Among the primary communicative processes of society may be mentioned: language; gesture, in its widest sense; the imitation of overt behavior and a large and ill-defined group of implicit processes which grow out of overt behavior and which may be rather vaguely referred to as "social suggestion." All these goes deeper to highlight the fundamental link that communication plays. According to Robert Craig (2001), communication can be "at once the disease that causes most of our social problems, and the only possible cure".

The relevance- socio-cultural approaches to communication theory address the ways our understandings, meanings, norms, roles, and rules are worked out interactively in communication. These theories explore the interactional worlds in which people live, positing the idea that reality is not an objective set of arrangements outside us but is constructed through a process of interaction in groups, communities and cultures.

The social cultural tradition is based on the premise that as people communicate they produce and reproduce culture –that communication has a ripple effect.

Thus, our interactions construct our realities establish our cultures as guided by: its focus on patterns of interaction between people rather an individual characteristics or mental models. That interaction is the process and site in which meanings, roles, rules and cultural values are worked out. And that this 'tradition' is very interested in the process of communications that occur in the actual situations (context).

We can therefore say that sociocultural theory is an emerging theory in psychology that looks at the important contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live.

The Sociocultural tradition as we have seen addresses the ways our undertakings, meanings, norms, roles, and rules are worked interactively in communication. This tradition holds that reality is not an objective set of arrangements outside us but is constructed through a process of communicating in groups, society, and cultures. It focuses on patterns of interactions rather than individual characteristics of mental model. Unlike the theories under the Cybernetic tradition, those under this tradition are less concerned with the network of connection among individuals and more focused on the shared meanings and interpretations that are constructed within the network and the implications of these constructions for organizational life. Part of what gets made is a sense of what organization is – its structure and form.

In other words, our conversation create maps for understanding the structure of the organization, but these guides our common understandings, are made possible by deeper structures of meaning that emerge in the talk.

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