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Language as a means of communication and social construction: Regarding the formation of our identity and shared culture

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the cultural dimension of language that turns into an issue of identity. The paper analyses the relationship between communication/language and culture. The deductive method, analysis, synthesis, and modelling, combined with a literature search in several databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus search and Web of Science, made possible the revelation of the issue of language as a means of communication, social construction, and the formation of our identity and common culture. The presented research was developed by describing various approaches and models of the concept of culture that have influenced and continue to influence intercultural communication, and by describing linguistic theories related to the relationship between language and culture. The results of the work have shown the connections between language, discourse, individual, and culture. The concept of individual identity has been established. The phenomenon of the social and/or cultural identity of a group and their differences was revealed. In the article a philosophical judgment about intercultural dialog was conducted. In addition, the question of what the identity and behaviour of individuals in their collective life was revealed. The revelation of these issues has shown that dealing with the cultural nature of language is not an easy task, especially in terms of the hypothesis that language is a distinctive feature of individuals. The results of the work have shown that it is a discourse in the intercultural dialogue that represents ways of speaking that are specific to both

individuals and shared cultures. In the era of interference, intercultural communication is opportune and appropriate. The importance of the results lies in the development of four competencies in the context of “plurality of languages” that show how cultural identity traits can enable the intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: culture, language, intercultural communication, intercultural dialogue, cultural differences.

Introduction

The question of whether the language, as a means of communication and social construction shapes human identity individually and shared cultures in general, is a controversial one. The process of globalisation, which initially dominated only the economic sphere, has subsequently led to profound economic, social, political, and cultural transformations, affecting interethnic and interfaith relations. At the cultural level, globalisation is manifested through the tendency to undermine minority cultures, cultural homogenisation, changes in national value models, and the emergence of hybrid cultural forms. Increasingly, there is talk of cultural globalisation materialising in a specific set of values and beliefs that are widely shared around the world. In the context of these new realities, there is an obvious need to promote intercultural communication without losing our own identity. The very concept of intercultural communication includes two fundamental concepts - culture and language, their meaning and interrelation are discussed in this paper.

Research Problem

In the framework of a philosophical discussion of language as a means of communication, social construction, identity formation and common culture, the term “culture” should be first considered. The term “culture” has a long history in the language and comes from the Latin *colere*, which means to care for a field or cattle, to cultivate the land, which reminds us of the beginning of agrarian civilization, of the setlines of humanity (Divjak, Milin & Medimorec, 2020). Over time, by analogy, the meaning of “culture of the spirit” developed. In diachronic terms, the concept of culture has been interpreted in different ways. It is explained by its extremely broad scope. A comprehensive presentation of the concept of culture through a plurality of definitions is presented in many related works (Doszhan & Gauriyeva, 2019). The definitions are divided into seven categories: enumerative-descriptive (the most famous – the culture (or civilization), taken in its broad ethnographic meaning, is the complex that includes knowledge, faith, art, morality, law, customs and all other abilities acquired by a person as a member of society), genetic (the culture is everything in the environment and consists of implicit and explicit, rational, irrational and non-rational patterns that exist at a certain time as potential guidelines), historical (the culture is a way of life of a community, a social inheritance that an individual takes over from his or her group), functional (the culture is a single whole consisting of consumer goods, constitutional rights granted to different social groups, ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs), behavioural (the culture is a total set of learned forms of behaviour and their results, the constituent elements of which are shared and transmitted by members of society), symbolic character (any culture can be considered as a set of symbolic systems of the first rank, which include tribal rules, economic relations, art, science, religion) (Beaver & Stanley, 2019). From a philosophical point of view, the culture is a system of signs, sign practices, through which a person encodes the experience and transmits it (synchronously and diachronously). The culture, therefore, appears as a set of languages, symbols, and signs that are integrated into the process of communication (Azeri, 2019), with language being the main means of being.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the philosophical concept of language as a cultural code of a nation. Although the language and the culture are different entities, they cannot develop independently; both are products of the spirit and interact in the development of the spirituality of each community (Dessiatnitchenko, 2022). In a broad sense, the culture is a set of intellectual aspects of civilization and is embodied in the sum of acquired consciousness in a cumulative system of knowledge products that enable the development of critical thinking, taste, judgment, etc. The language has a double relevance. Playing an active role in social construction, it enables the culture to survive and develop; as a phenomenon of cultural contagion, it affects the way modern people understand and interpret cultural phenomena (Caton, 2020). Thus, a living image of people culture, including its ethnonym and ethno type, is reflected in the spoken language, which becomes a cultural code. The close connection between the language and culture materialises in the process of communication. Based on the impressive number of definitions of communication, scholars group them into two schools: procedural (where communication is interpreted as a means of transmitting messages) and semiotic (where communication is interpreted as the production and exchange of meanings) (Leigh, 2020). Both schools offer a definition of communication based on the understanding of communication as interaction through messages.

Literature Review/Theoretical Overview

Communication involves the exchange of information that takes place between individuals, a connection that is understood in different ways. In terms of philosophical concepts, it is defined as an interaction, as a process by which one person creates a connection with another person or influences their behaviour, state of mind, or emotional responses (Bourget & Chalmers, 2021), while in semiotic terms, communication is defined as interaction as something that constitutes an individual as a member of a particular culture or society (Innis, 2020). According to Gordon (2020), there are two broad types of definitions of communication. The first realises communication as the process by which A sends a message to B, a message that has an impact on B. The second interprets communication as the negotiation and exchange of meanings, a process in which messages, culturally defined persons, and reality interact in ways that help produce meaning and achieve understanding. Communication is thus the most prominent characteristic of human society. It underlies interpersonal and interethnic relations (Shytyk & Akimova, 2020). Taking a closer look at what happens during communication, Vendler (2019), an epistemologist and communication scientist, notes that through this activity the identity is acquired, as communication always has a common goal - the expression of identity. Winters & Nathan (2020) argue in the same vein. Other scholars argue that people communicate in order to have the desired identity in the communication situation in which they manifest themselves (Dingemanse, Perlman & Perniss, 2020). Referring to the research and theorisation of communication in the diachronic plane, Politi (2020) in his study identifies seven traditions: The rhetorical tradition, which theorises communication as a practical art of discourse, the semiotic tradition, which views communication as intersubjective mediation through signs, the phenomenological tradition, for which theorising communication is theorising the experience of difference and dialogue, the cybernetic tradition, in which communication is theorized as an information process, the sociopsychological or social psychology tradition that theorises communication as a process of self-expression, interaction, and influence, the sociological or social psychology tradition, which theorises communication as a process of Orujov (2021) argues that culture and communication form a strange pair. Neither can be explained without the other. These two phenomena are not perfectly hermetic, they do not contain each other, and they cannot be placed in the plane of parallel reflections according to an analogous correspondence (Gobbo & Russo, 2020).

In this paper, communication is interpreted as a constitutive factor of culture, a defining and structural element without which any form of culture cannot be understood. It means the constant exchange of information, messages, and meanings between individuals and groups gives the cultural phenomenon integrity and richness (Baggini & Fosl, 2020). This is the essence of human social life, as living together, storing information, and passing on social heritage to new generations would not be possible without the existence of various forms of signs and communication (O'Halloran, 2019). According to Masolo (2019), communication is another dimension of cultural facts. All human cultural actions take place in the process of social activity, are determined by the society, and have completeness in the social and human function, which is achieved through communication (Amirshakhova, 2020). Culture, due to its communicative aspect, is a social phenomenon (Karimzad, 2021). It is not possible in all its dynamics outside of society. The culture, by its genesis and purpose, is a social phenomenon, inherited through social mechanisms, assimilated and learned, leading an individual to humanity and its highest values (Bietti, 2020). The communicative factor is not external to culture but is part of its content and purpose (Nerubasska, Palshkov & Maksymchuk, 2020). Guliyev's statement that one of the characteristic features of the culture is communication can be seen in the same vein: history knows no closed, hermetically sealed cultures, even among seemingly geographically isolated communities or peoples. Communication is an organic human need, born of human nature. This need, having the same basis, extends to his cultural creations. Since, after all, the goal of creators is communication, the cultural values they create need to be shared with others. The creator always addresses their nearer or more distant contemporaries and descendants.

Thus, cultural values are realised, expanded, and their content enriched, strengthened, and improved through communication. Consequently, the culture cannot exist and develop outside of language; it can be interpreted as the cultural code of a nation materialised in communication.

Research Methodology

The theoretical and methodological basis of the work is based on the achievements of philosophy, linguistics, linguoculturology, which led to the use of the following scientific methods: deductive method, analysis, synthesis, modelling. The paper searched for literature in several databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus search, and Web of Science. The specific keywords used were philosophy of language, linguistic culture, concept, cognitive linguistics, vocabulary, and definitions. The timeframe of the articles went beyond 2018-2021 to include only the most recent data. The inclusion criteria included papers that discussed any form of innovation in Azerbaijani philosophy of language, linguistics, and linguocultural studies. The exclusion criteria were scholarly works that did not coincide with the subject matter of the paper. In addition, articles published in languages other than English were excluded, but those published in Azerbaijan and having a translated part were included. While this was not a systematic review, we believe that an orderly approach to the search strategy is warranted to ensure that the maximum numbers of relevant articles found were retrieved.

General Background

The main goal of this article was to provide a narrative overview of the relevant literature, a comprehensive overview of the topic, in order to identify research questions and help expanding and identifying new directions for research on language as a means of communication and social construction, as a powerful mechanism that shapes our identity and common culture. The narrative synthesis was the first step in conducting an in-depth, methodical analysis of the data and organising it properly. Relevant information was verified, organized, and collected. This allowed us to summarize the results of the study. The articles selected for further consideration were analysed one by one to determine the general concept that best reflects the relevance of the research topic.

Research Results

The language as a means of communication and social construction is inextricably linked to cultural diversity and communication (Odacioğlu, 2019). Intercultural communication at the intersection of language and culture shapes our identity and common culture (Godart-Wendling, 2020). In the era of global interference, intercultural communication is opportune and necessary. The interdisciplinary nature of intercultural studies combines contributions and research results from various fields of social sciences and humanities, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, history, visual arts, ethnology, political and economic sciences, international relations, etc. In recent years, groups and associations interested in intercultural communication have been created in the philosophy of language, courses in intercultural studies have been introduced into university curricula, and specialised works have appeared that have contributed to the status and specificity of the discipline of Intercultural Communication in the broader context of interdisciplinary studies.

Although the discipline was originally focused on philosophy and linguistics, today the field is developing along a dual trajectory: theoretical (research) and applied (aimed at teaching intercultural communication practices). As a new discipline, intercultural communication is constantly evolving, and many of its general and specific topics and issues are still far from being clarified and systematised. In this regard, Glazebrook (2020) notes that the research into the nature of intercultural communication has raised many questions but produced few theories and far fewer answers. Many studies have been related to fields other than communication, especially anthropology, philosophy, international relations, social psychology, sociology, and psycholinguistics. Despite the large number of research topics, the gained knowledge has not been systematised in science. Today, intercultural communication studies those elements of culture that have the greatest impact on the interaction between representatives of two or more cultures when individuals are in situations of interpersonal communication. As a specific situation of interpersonal communication, intercultural communication carries elements of what is broadly referred to the culture (Gizi, 2019). In the process of intercultural communication, depending on the purpose and the situation, one of two types of language can be used: the verbal or non-verbal language. According to Emmott (2020), the verbal communication is aimed at the exchange of information and ideas, the intellectual and emotional contact between interlocutors, and influence. The non-verbal communication is the accumulation of messages that are not expressed in words and that can be decoded to create meaning. These signals can repeat, contradict, replace, supplement, or emphasise the message conveyed by words. In comparative terms, both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication contribute to the effect of a “plurality of languages” and a cultural unitary space dominated by the exchange of ideas, feelings, and values.

The lack of knowledge about all the mechanisms that govern the construction of cultural identity raises the question of what exactly guarantees cultural construction, the language, or the discourse. From this perspective, a model of multilingual competence that shows how cultural identity features can be raised at each of the cultural levels is proposed.

Table 1

Competencies that form the identity of a common culture

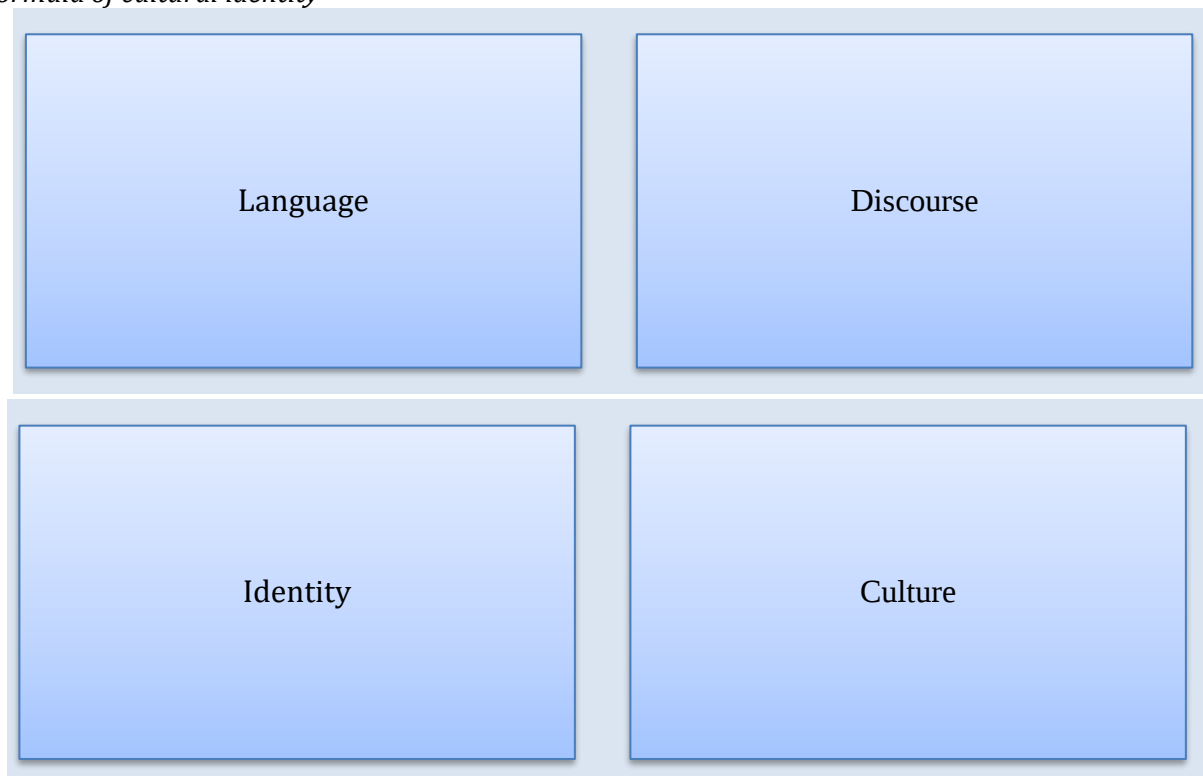
Situational competence	✚ Requires any communicating and interpreting subject to be able to construct their discourse in accordance with the identity of their partners. It is the identity of the speaking subject that determines and justifies his or her “right to speak.” It is at this level of competence that one will be able to observe how each cultural community overcomes different situations of communication, how people take their place in society, what words can be said, or what are considered taboo. This is a discursive realisation.
Discourse competence	✚ Requires that any communicating and interpreting subject be able to recognise and manipulate discourse processes according to the constraints of the situational structure. They are essentially speaking, narrative, and explanatory. It is on these processes that language rituals (written and oral) are built, which correspond to the cultural habits of each community. It is these rituals that constitute social and cultural language behaviour.
Semantic competence	✚ Refers to what cognitive scientists call a “mutually shared cognitive environment”. It is a fact that in order to understand each other, it is necessary to refer to common knowledge that corresponds to value systems, more or less standardised, that circulate in a social group, that feed the judgments of its members, and that at the same time give meaning to the existence of identity (this is how the so-called “collective thoughts” are formed). This semantic skill is very complex, as it is mainly based on the experience of living in society.
Semiolinguistic competence	✚ Requires any communicating and interpreting subject to be able to recognise and manipulate the form of signs, their rules of combination, and their meaning. It is at this level that sentences and texts are built. To build a text, certain ability is required to adjust the realisation of form and intention, according to the limitations defined in each culture separately, because each of them does not have the same habits of organising texts.

Source: author's own development

This four-part competence is a prerequisite for intercultural communication. And it is in the articulation of these skills that cultural identity is developed. This is how the relationship between language-discourse-identity-culture plays out.

Figure 1

The formula of cultural identity



Source: author (s) own development

The language is a system of forms that convey meaning common to members of a language community. Thus, it testifies to a certain identity (national, regional), the identity of a group. The language acts as a mirror and emblem of identity. The discourse is a mechanism of linguistic behaviour that indicates the habits, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments that characterise a social group and the norms that regulate the relations established between individuals living in society. This mechanism both characterises and modifies the language system. But the relationship between the language and the discourse is not absolute.

Discussion

Thus, the language is a means of communication and social construction. In this regard, intercultural communication shapes the intercultural dialogue. The intercultural dialogue, in turn, is a product of globalisation, which can be used to promote cultural values and resolve situations of interethnic conflict (Gulshan, 2019). The word “dialog” dates back to the time of Aristotle. The main thing for a person is his or her ability to engage in dialogue; the philosopher promoted philosophical ideas and concepts through dialogue, tried to reorganise the spiritual life of his contemporaries (Grimaldi, 2020). Today, the increased interest in intercultural dialogue is dictated by its undeniable value in solving acute problems of society. There are several definitions of the intercultural dialogue in the scientific literature. Mammedzadeh (2019) believes that the idea of intercultural dialogue begins with the premise of recognizing the differences and plurality of the world in which we live. These differences exist not only within each culture but also in the relations between cultures. The intercultural dialogue is a process that encourages the identification of the boundaries that define people and that leads them to interact across and even question those boundaries (Morley, Floridi, Kinsey & Elhalal, 2020). Another definition of intercultural dialogue can be found on a network for the exchange of information about cultural policy activities and tools and cultural trends (Suleiman, 2019). According to Tesar (2021), the intercultural dialogue is a process that involves an open and mutually respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds.

Measures that can be taken to achieve this goal are, in this vision, strategic tools that promote cultural diversity resulting from social interaction, and intercultural dialogue at the national level should include public and private cultural initiatives that bring together individuals and groups belonging to immigrant communities and the majority population to make them part of a multidirectional communication process (Nicolai & Rossi, 2018). The definition of the intercultural dialogue can also be found in Feith (2019). According to the author, intercultural dialogue is a form of dialogue that focuses on one's own culture and the culture of others.

It is believed that the factors that make this form of dialogue possible are openness to the other, willingness to listen and share ideas. The successful formation of our identity and common culture is possible only in the context of the intercultural dialogue, which is characterised by respect, trust, equality, cultural curiosity, and the ability to change. The degree of success of intercultural dialogue depends on the social construction, the relationships between the participants, and the atmosphere of intercultural dialogue, which should be based on mutual trust.

The language as a means of communication and social construction is important both for those who share the same spiritual and material values and for those who have different views on cultural values, the latter form of dialogue being important for conflict resolution.

Conclusions and Implications

Today, the language is not only the art of communication, as it used to be perceived, but also a means of communication and social construction, which is possible only in dialogue. In order for a dialogue to be productive, a number of requirements must be met, such as: understanding of the essence of the problem by interlocutors, tolerance, patience, power of persuasion, conciseness, eloquence, ability to concede when the argumentation was wrong.

The formation of our identity and common culture is a kind of global awakening and means rising to a level of consciousness from which one can see that cultures, religions, and ideologies are situated against a common background of reality and those radical differences are also situated in a field of unity. This "global awakening" is also being realised through a dynamic intercultural dialog. The phenomenon of shared culture is a new type of intercultural relationship that signifies a new provocative and dramatic dialogue to achieve a new, globalist understanding of reality. In this context, a personal and global transformation of life and behaviour emerges: self-lives in a new global consciousness, a dialogical consciousness. It can be interpreted as the cultural code of a nation embodied in communication. In this context, cultural pluralism, which characterises the modern world, should be seen as a positive factor contributing to the spiritual evolution of society, and intercultural communication as timely and necessary.

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Conflict of Interest

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