The interconnectedness of culture, language, and intercultural communication: A critical review

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Florian Buelt[1]
Hsueh-Hua Chuang[2]

(Corresponding Author)

[1]*International Graduate Program of Education and Human Development, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Taiwan.*
Email: f.bult@g-mail.nsysu.edu.tw
[2]*Institute of Education, Center for Teacher Education, and International Graduate Program of Education and Human Development, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Taiwan.*
Email: hsuehhua@g-mail.nsysu.edu.tw

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the evolving conceptualizations of culture and their impact on language and intercultural communication. Tracing the historical evolution of cultural theory, it highlights the shift from static, essentialist definitions to more dynamic perspectives. The analysis draws on key theoretical frameworks, including categorization of culture as product, discourse, practice, ideology, and globalization, to interrogate how culture is produced, communicated, and enforced. Particular focus is given to the role of language as a driver for cultural expression, a means for negotiating cultural values and identities, and a key component of intercultural competence. Definitions of cultures and their interconnectedness with language and intercultural communication are connected, especially in view of an increasingly globalized world. Shifting conceptualizations of culture emerge and their implications on both languaguage use and broad communication between various members of society are presented. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding the fluid and interconnected nature of culture, language, and the intercultural in an increasingly globalized world, advocating for a critical approach that acknowledges culturally and linguistically inherent power dynamics.

Keywords: *Critical culture theory, Culture, Intercultural communication, Sociocultural theory, Sociolinguistics.*

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Highlights of this paper

- The paper synthesizes models of culture with sociolinguistic and critical perspectives, offering a dynamic and interdisciplinary lens to analyze culture beyond static definitions.
- By interrogating the bidirectional relationship between language and culture, the paper positions language as both a *tool* for interpersonal negotiation and an *exercise* of ideological power, i.e., challenging native-speaker norms of English.
- The paper critiques classical for essentialism and presents modern approaches) that prioritize individual agency, interpersonal communication, and critical awareness in intercultural encounters.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is central to the human experience as it influences behavior, communication and our very own identities. Culture manifests in various forms ranging from tangible artifacts to shared beliefs, practices and transglobal movements, shaping interactions at the individual and societal levels. Despite penetrating every aspect of human life, culture is notoriously difficult to capture through a singular definite, as its meaning varies between disciplines, historical contexts and sociocultural perspectives. This paper seeks to critically examine conceptualizations of culture, tracing the evolution of the concept throughout historical definitions. Particular focus is given to Baker (2015a) theoretical framework of culture as product, discourse, practice, ideology, and globalization to interrogate how culture is produced, communicated and enforced through different perspectives.

Language plays a key role in the proliferation of culture, as it not only serves as driver for cultural expression, but also as a means for cultural values and identities to be negotiated and constructed. Linguistic practices shape how individuals perceive and interact with the world. Drawing on sociocultural theory, such as Fishman's (2004) functions of language in culture, this paper contributes to understanding how language reflects represents, expresses symbolizes culture.

At the intersection of language and cultures lies the concept of intercultural communication. While much attention has already been given to the competencies that define successful intercultural communication—such as Byram (2021) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) or De Leo (2010) levels of intercultural learning—their historical and sociolinguistic foundations are rarely discussed. Beginning with the early conceptualizations of intercultural communication one-sided cross-cultural exchanges during the rebuilding of WWII occupied states and as contrast-based comparisons through Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980) cultural dimensions, this, this paper points out critiques in cultural theory that still have lasting impacts in the field.

These approaches are contrasted modern intercultural perspectives that emphasize the role of discourse, power dynamics, and the situated nature of intercultural exchanges, recognizing that meaning is actively co-constructed rather than passively inherited.

Ultimately, this paper addresses the gap resulting from the lack of an interdisciplinary and interconnected understanding of culture, language, and intercultural communication, each of which is shaped by the historical evolution of their distinct concepts. By analyzing how cultural meanings are negotiated through language, this paper explores how models of intercultural communication have developed over time. It also considers how these models are informed by the evolution of culture and language. In doing so, it moves beyond static definitions of culture, positioning it as a dynamic and contested phenomenon that can only be fully understood when its underlying intentions are interrogated. Understanding the intertwined nature of culture, language and the intercultural is crucial for conceptualizing culture and addressing the complexities of cultural exchange in an increasingly globalized world.

2. CULTURE: A COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC FORCE

Culture is an ever-present force that shapes our lives, guiding our actions, thoughts, and interactions. Despite its omnipresence, defining culture remains a challenge. This paradox becomes evident as the more we analyze culture, the harder it becomes to capture it in a single definition. In an era of digitalization and globalization, cultural ideas spread rapidly, evolving faster than empirical definitions can capture. Nonetheless, a detailed examination of culture is essential for this study. To balance empirical rigor with the dynamic nature of culture, this section outlines key characteristics commonly associated with the concept of culture. Recognizing that no single definition suffices, this analysis adopts an intersectional approach, drawing from linguistics, pedagogy, and cultural communication to highlight the importance of viewing culture from a broad perspective. Once the main characteristics of culture are identified, the focus can shift to how cultural ideas are communicated and integrated into educational contexts. However, understanding the qualities of culture is a prerequisite for promoting intercultural communication.

The complexity and breadth of culture were first acknowledged by Tylor (1871) who described it as a complex system that includes "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"(p.19), "Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 19).

Tylor emphasized that culture is acquired through socialization and varies across groups. Notably, he used "culture" and "civilization" interchangeably, showing their synonymous relationship. While Tylor's definition does not explicitly mention language, it leaves room for its inclusion. The fusion of culture and language was central to Sapir (1921) who described culture as a system of shared meanings and practices that are inherent language to specific languages, with different languages resulting in varying cultural and social interactions.

To approach culture systematically, its etymological roots offer insight. The term originates from the Latin *colore*, meaning "to cultivate" or "to worship," reflecting the idea of nurturing civilization. It also connects to *colonus*, implying inhabitation and acquisition, aligning with Tylor's view of culture as a learned process. Williams (1976) further links culture to *cultus*, the root of "cult," with Eagleton (2009) highlighting its sacred and often political dimensions. Culture, he argues, is both creative and destructive, embodying contradictions that make it deeply intertwined with humanity itself. Hannerz (1992) similar described culture as a network of meanings that individuals navigate in their daily lives, shaped by both local traditions and global influences, making the meaning of culture applicable to all human interaction.

Eagleton (2009) critiques the modern tendency to overextend the concept of culture, arguing that its broad application weakens its core meaning. He suggests that the term "culture" is both too broad and too narrow to be highly useful, as its anthropological meaning encompasses everything from hairstyles and drinking habits to social norms, while its aesthetic sense includes figures like Igor Stravinsky but excludes genres like science fiction. Eagleton warns against assigning cultural value indiscriminately, as it complicates efforts to define and teach culture. He advocates for a more objective and politically enlightened understanding of culture, one that avoids emotional entanglements. Appadurai (1996) echoes this sentiment, arguing that culture is a highly contested concept that needs distinct boundaries and context to be useful, emphasizing the need to separate it from emotionally subjective interpretations.

To disentangle these complexities, Baker (2015b) proposes a multidimensional approach, breaking culture into comprehensible yet interconnected parts:

Culture as a Product: Shared material and abstract traits that define groups.

Culture as Discourse: Language and communication as drivers of cultural meaning.

Culture as Practice: Everyday actions and rituals that embody cultural values.

Culture as Ideology: Beliefs and values that shape social norms.

Culture as a Result of Globalization: The interplay of local and global influences.

Risager (2006) supports this multifaceted view, arguing that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic process of meaning-making in all asppects of human existence. Similarly, Holliday (1999) provides a framework for understanding cultural dimensions, such as individualism vs. collectivism, which influence how cultures are perceived and experienced in all aspects of daily life, discourses, practices and ideologies.

2.1. Culture as Product

The most common approach to defining culture is through the idea that culture is a product, which is shared by groups of people (Baker, 2015a). This product can be materialized in a physical form or take on abstract levels. These physical items, values, and ideas define a specific group of people and differentiate them from others. Through the common sharing of traits, cultural identities can be formed.

Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) provide a framework for understanding cultural products, emphasizing how shared values and practices create distinct cultural identities. They argue that cultural products, such as symbols, rituals, and heroes, are visible manifestations of deeper cultural values.

Jandt (1995) defines culture as the totality of a group's thoughts, experiences, conceptions of culture, patterns of behavior, and the concepts, values, and assumptions about life that guide behavior. He also highlights how these elements evolve through contact with other cultures. However, Jandt's definition focuses on a single group, drawing clear boundaries between different cultural groups. This perspective suggests that culture, as defined by Jandt, serves to differentiate and separate people of different groups rather than integrate them.

The iceberg metaphor, introduced by Hall (1976) is a widely known representation of culture as a product. To an outside observer, only a small part of culture is visible. However, in Hall's metaphor, the majority of culture becomes visible once an outsider dives deeper into the culture. This "deep culture" includes beliefs, values, and thought patterns. To an outsider, deep culture becomes visible once the cultural norms and values of the target culture are acquired. This adaptation process is referred to as "acculturation" in social psychology and is visualized by models such as the U and W curves of culture shock and adaptation. Berry (1997) elaborates on the concept of acculturation, describing it as a dynamic process of cultural adaptation that involves both psychological and sociocultural changes.

Baker (2015a) points out that these static and "deterministic" depictions of culture can hinder our understanding, as they risk stereotyping and reducing culture to objects and thoughts. Piller (2011) further critiques this approach, arguing that reducing culture to overly deterministic and essentialist portrayals overlooks its negotiated, contested, and dynamic nature. Nonetheless, the idea of culture as a product remains widespread in L2 language teaching, as it promotes understanding of group and national identities. It can serve as an introduction to culture before addressing its more fluid and discursive qualities.

2.2. Culture as Discourse

Analyzing culture as discourse recognizes language and communication as central drivers of culture. Kramsch (1998) describes members of a culture, or a discourse community, as sharing a common social space, history, and system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. Interactions within a culture are characterized by a shared language and agreement on topics, presentation of information, and interaction styles. This approach,

rooted in applied linguistics, highlights the relevance of language and communicative interaction, making it particularly useful for second language acquisition and intercultural learning in formal educational contexts.

Gee (2008) expands on Kramsch's interpretation by dividing discourse into "discourse with a lower d" and "Discourse with a capital D." Discourse (lowercase d) refers to language use, while Discourse (capital D) encompasses broader social conventions that allow individuals to enact specific identities and activities. As Wenger (1998) argues, these identities and activities are shaped through participation in communities of practice, where individuals collaboratively create and recreate cultural meanings. Discourse analysis, therefore, focuses on how language is used in interpretation and adaptation processes, forming group identities. As such, discourse analysis is inherently tied to language analysis, and the connection between language and culture is a recurring theme in this thesis.

Baker (2005) notes that while discourse and language are closely connected, they are not synonymous. Language can be attributed to specific discourse communities, and discourses—such as those on global warming or democracy—can occur in multiple languages. For example, the discourse of globalization spans nearly all of the world's languages (Pennycook, 2007). Baker emphasizes that while language, discourse, and culture are not entirely interchangeable, their connections are deeply intertwined.

Cultural discourses create ingroups and outgroups, with language determining who can participate in a cultural discourse. Since language can be acquired, cultural memberships can also be acquired. This perspective differs from structuralist approaches that view culture as a static product (Kramsch, 1998). As Duranti (1997) highlights, language is not just a tool for communication but a medium through which cultural knowledge and practices are encoded and transmitted.

Discourse systems are complex, allowing individuals to participate in multiple discourses simultaneously. Language enables intercultural discourses to transcend traditional national boundaries (Hannerz, 1992). Baker (2015a) highlights the flexibility of this approach, which is well-suited for understanding culture in applied linguistics. While discourse systems may limit the content and audience of a particular discourse, language can be acquired, adapted, and extended to different purposes and people.

2.3. Culture as Practice

Baker (2015a) describes culture as moving from being a noun to being a verb, shifting from a static view of culture to a more active and fluid approach. In this conceptualization, culture is characterized as a practice. This perspective moves away from identifying key elements that unite individuals into a group and instead focuses on the interactions between individuals and the subjectively negotiated nature of their actions within a cultural setting.

Wenger (1998) supports this view, arguing that culture is enacted through communities of practice, where individuals collaboratively create and recreate cultural meanings through shared activities. Risager (2006) further explores this idea, stating that cultural symbols are continuously created and redefined through negotiation and interaction among individuals. Here, culture is viewed as almost alive in itself, with individuals engaging in a continuous process of negotiation that results in the creation and evolution of cultural practices. Individuals have the opportunity to reinterpret and give new meaning to cultural practices and are not merely reduced to passive constituents. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize the role of situated learning in cultural practices, where knowledge is co-constructed through participation in social activities.

The role of discourse and cultural practices is viewed as being closely linked. Holliday (2013) describes how discourse enables individuals to adopt and conform to cultural practices. Pennycook (2010) takes this a step further by conceptualizing language as a cultural practice itself, arguing that it provides a more useful framework for

understanding culture. He suggests that while language practices are closely tied to cultural practices, they are not synonymous. Pennycook does not see language and cultural practice as interchangeable, as language is not always a form of cultural practice, and not every cultural practice is a form of language practice. This perspective frees language from being tied to fixed notions of nations, cultures, and political correlations (Baker, 2015a; Pennycook, 2010). Blommaert (2010) further explores the relationship between language and cultural practices, arguing that language is a key resource for enacting cultural identities in globalized contexts.

2.4. Culture as Ideology

In the aforementioned characterizations of culture, culture was illustrated as the result of natural interaction and communication processes—essentially approached as descriptive in nature. Describing culture as ideology, however, assumes it follows an agenda and prescribes certain actions to individuals. In its most extreme form, culture is seen as a tool with manipulative capabilities that enforces a specific worldview upon its members.

Fairclough (1995) discusses how ideology is embedded in discourse, shaping social practices and power relations. He emphasizes that critical discourse analysis is essential for uncovering the ideological dimensions of culture. Similarly, Piller (2011) highlights how culture can function as an ideological construct, producing and reproducing social categories and boundaries. She stresses the importance of critically analyzing cultural differences, considering their underlying reasons, forms, and consequences.

Van Dijk (1998) further supports this view by emphasizing how ideology influences cultural narratives, shaping individuals' perceptions and interpretations of cultural differences. When culture takes the form of ideology, one cultural model is often favored over another by governing institutions. Throughout history, ideology has shaped cultural dimensions, with contemporary examples including the European Union's promotion of peace and economic stability through a unifying cultural framework. Shore (2000) examines how the European Union employs cultural symbols and narratives to construct a shared European identity, revealing the ideological dimensions of cultural integration.

In this sense, one might argue that every culture carries ideology. While the examples above represent extreme ends of a spectrum, Gee (2008) points out that cultural models serve as simplifications of reality. The way individuals perceive the world is always shaped by their personal ideology. He advocates for the critical questioning of cultural models, emphasizing that individuals are both beneficiaries and victims of ideology through language and cultural participation. Gee suggests that interrogating cultural models and replacing them with more well-developed theories is a moral obligation, as these theories, although still models, may provide improved frameworks for understanding culture.

Luke (1997) aligns with this perspective, asserting that critical literacy is essential for examining cultural ideologies and fostering social change. In the classroom, educators can expose students to diverse worldviews and theories, enabling them to critically evaluate their own perspectives. This engagement fosters critical cultural awareness, an essential component of intercultural learning. In an era of technological advancement, the internet constantly exposes individuals to an overwhelming range of cultural ideas, further complicating the interplay of culture and ideology. As globalization intensifies, digitalization and shifting international identities contribute to the conceptualization of globalization as a cultural force in its own right.

2.5. Culture, Nation, and Globalization

Exchanges of cultures beyond their original boundaries are a natural result of intercultural interaction. In recent history, technological advancements have significantly expanded the scope of these exchanges, redefining

how cultures transcend national and cultural borders. Appadurai (1996) conceptualizes globalization as a process of cultural flows in which ideas, people, and technologies circulate across borders, creating new cultural hybridities.

Scholte (2008) describes globalization as the expansion of transplanetary and supraterritorial connections, emphasizing how reduced barriers facilitate human interaction across linguistic, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Tomlinson (1999) explores these cultural dimensions of globalization, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges it presents for intercultural communication.

Increased human interaction inevitably leads to greater cultural exchange. The reduction of barriers enables a supraterritorial flow of information, bypassing the limitations of physical state boundaries. Baker (2015a) argues that globalization disrupts the traditional nation-state monopoly on culture, as it is a transnational process beyond the control of any single governing entity.

Ritzer (2004) addresses the homogenizing effects of globalization, illustrating how global cultural products, such as fast food and media, contribute to a process of cultural standardization. Similarly, Risager (2006) advocates for a transnational perspective on language and culture, emphasizing that languages and cultures spread across networks of linguistic and cultural flows. Canagarajah (2013) reinforces this perspective by exploring how multilingual practices facilitate cultural exchange and hybridity.

For the classroom, globalization enables educators to introduce foreign cultures without requiring physical travel. Authentic materials—published multilingually by governments, information agencies, and news outlets—offer immediate access to global developments and can be critically examined within formal intercultural learning settings. However, when encountering an unfamiliar culture, educators must avoid viewing it through a singular, fixed perspective.

Kramsch (2009) underscores the significance of authentic materials in fostering intercultural awareness, as they provide learners with insights into the fluid and contested nature of culture. While static models, such as the "iceberg" metaphor of culture, can serve as an introductory tool, intercultural education should also address the discursive, practical, and ideological dimensions of culture. A more dynamic approach recognizes that culture evolves through interactions and exchanges, largely driven by language use.

Byram (2008) highlights the importance of cultivating critical cultural awareness, which equips learners to navigate the complexities of intercultural communication in an increasingly globalized world. Holliday (2011) supports this stance, advocating for a critical approach to intercultural education that encourages both educators and learners to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and biases.

Ultimately, there is no single correct approach to defining culture. However, we must critically question why culture is addressed and in which specific ways, what intentions are pursued, and which power dynamics are enacted through these discourses. By interrogating the ideological and societal structures that sustain cultural representations, we can enact our agency to freely express ourselves in the cultural spaces provided to us.

3. RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Language use involves a combination of linguistic subskills. Proficient language use demonstrates high competence across various dimensions, each serving different communicative needs. Van Ek (1986) identifies the competences necessary for successful communication (cf. Table 1). These include not only lexical and grammatical knowledge but also the ability to adapt to social, cultural, and strategic contexts. Strategic, sociolinguistic, and cultural competences are acquired through interactions with other speakers, which are themselves influenced by the language competences of those speakers.

Table 1. Classification of communicative competences.

Competence type	Description
Linguistic competence	Involves the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances, including the correct use of lexis and grammar.
Sociolinguistic competence	Encompasses awareness of how language choice is influenced by various external forces such as speakers, relationships, and communicative settings. It also includes understanding the relationship between language and context.
Discourse competence	Refers to the ability to use appropriate strategies for constructing and interpreting texts. This involves fitting language into a broader context while adhering to discourse conventions.
Strategic competence	Involves developing ways to convey meaning effectively when communication becomes difficult, as well as employing strategies that aid in the successful interpretation and negotiation of meaning.
Sociocultural competence	Recognizes that language is embedded within sociocultural contexts and must align with cultural norms, values, and beliefs influencing language use and interaction beyond linguistic appropriateness.
Social competence	Relates to the ability to handle social interactions effectively, requiring speakers to demonstrate the willingness and motivation to engage with others while adhering to norms of concrete speech events.

Source: Van Ek (1986).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) divides language proficiency into four core dimensions, closely resembling Van Ek's model. Communicative language competences are complemented by "savoirs," which describe the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for intercultural learning (Council of Europe, 2020). These will be discussed in detail in the context of intercultural communication and education.

Language learning is further described through four skills: reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Council of Europe, 2020). Both Van Ek's and the CEFR's models emphasize the importance of linguistic, sociocultural, and affective skills developed through interaction with speakers of the target language. A significant shift in the 2018 revision of the CEFR is the move away from prioritizing communication with native speakers. Instead, the focus is on successful communication with all speakers of the target language, including other learners. This change, summarized by replacing the native speaker with an interlocutor, reflects a more inclusive approach to intercultural communication.

Language has been a central element in the discussion of culture, whether as a core aspect of culture as practice, the main driver of culture in discourse, or a facilitator of cultural exchange in globalization. Just as culture is diverse, so too are the approaches to understanding the relationship between language and culture. This section explores how language facilitates intercultural learning and how it impacts this process, focusing on the connections between culture and language.

A key question arises: Is language learned through culture, or is culture learned through language? Language expresses cultural values and norms, enabling the development and exchange of cultural topics. Understanding this complex relationship allows for an integrated model of intercultural learning. Language serves as a mediating tool, a skill emphasized in modern curricula (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018).

The acquisition of a foreign language is crucial for embedding intercultural learning in the classroom. To achieve this, both language learning and intercultural learning must be clearly defined. Language acquisition has been extensively studied, with Noam Chomsky's theory of "Universal Grammar" (UG) being particularly influential. Chomsky (2006) posits that humans possess an innate capability for language acquisition, activated by exposure to sufficient input. Language acquisition involves setting internal parameters specific to the target language, akin to switches on an electronic board (Chomsky, 2006). Corbett (2022) applies this to intercultural

education, noting that foreign language learners develop an "interlanguage" through interaction, even without native speakers.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) further explores the relationship between language and cognition, suggesting that language shapes our perception of the world. While the strong version of the hypothesis—that language determines thought—has been widely criticized, the weak version, which posits that language influences thought, is generally accepted (Corbett, 2022). This weak hypothesis supports the idea that language mediates cultural understanding, allowing for adaptation and interpretation of other cultures.

Vygotsky (1981) and Vygotsky (1997) emphasizes the role of language in cognitive and cultural development, arguing that higher mental functions develop through social interaction. Language, as a cultural tool, enables individuals to participate in cultural behaviors and shapes their psychological development.

4. SOCIOLINGUISTIC VIEWS ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In sociolinguistics, Fishman (2004) explored how ethnocultural and intercultural values are represented through language use. He identified three key relationships between language and culture that shape how language enacts, indexes and symbolizes culture.

4.1. Language as a Part of Culture

Language is inseparable from culture, as human interaction is inherently "language-embedded" (Fishman, 2004). To participate in a culture, language use and communicative interactions are essential. Fishman argues that language shifts, losses, or changes often indicate broader cultural transformations, including dislocation or destruction, even if a sense of cultural identity persists. For example, the colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas led to European languages becoming dominant in many now-independent nations. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008) further emphasize that language is deeply embedded in social practices and cultural norms, serving as a key resource for socializing individuals into cultural practices (Ochs, 1996). Hall (1976) also highlights how language reflects and reinforces cultural norms and values, making it a central component of cultural identity.

4.2. Language as an Index of Culture

Language reflects the abstract thinking of a culture's members, providing a framework for expressing thoughts, feelings, and values. It also encodes cultural artifacts, concerns, and behaviors (Fishman, 2004). For instance, terms for colors, kinship, or illnesses reveal cultural priorities and worldviews. While language can limit understanding to its lexical boundaries, humans can also encode concepts beyond their native language. Speakers often take pride in their language's unique ability to express specific ideas, reinforcing cultural identity. Lucy (1997) through an extensive literature review and Boroditsky (2001) in an experiment between English and Mandarin speakers on time perception, provide empirical evidence for linguistic relativity, showing how language influences cultural perceptions and influences cognitive processes. Duranti (1997) further gives evidence on how language encodes cultural knowledge and practices, supporting Fishman's view of language as an index of culture.

4.3. Language as Symbolic of Culture

Language is a powerful cultural symbol, often defended or attacked as a marker of identity. In today's globalized world, language movements and conflicts use language as a symbol of cultural perfection and resistance to foreign influences (Fishman, 2004). This reciprocal relationship between language and culture creates a sense of "insiders" and "outsiders," which can hinder intercultural communication. Respecting the symbolic value of

language is crucial in intercultural settings. Blommaert (2005) and Pavlenko (2003) explore how language is used as a symbolic resource to assert cultural identity and power, reinforcing Fishman's view of language as a cultural symbol. Bourdieu (1991) also discusses the symbolic power of language, emphasizing its role in shaping cultural hierarchies and identities.

Fishman's work highlights the inseparability of language and culture, emphasizing their cognitive and affective connections. Language users feel deeply tied to their language, which serves as a gateway to their cultural identity.

Baker (2015a) builds on Fishman's ideas, linking language and culture through linguistic relativity. Language shapes how we perceive and express our worldview, and speakers identify with the cultural reality their language represents. Risager (2007) further argues that language is never "linguaculturally neutral," as it is always embedded in cultural practices. While language and culture are inseparable, they can be analyzed separately to understand their specific relationships. Atkinson (1999) emphasizes the importance of linguistic relativity in shaping cultural identity, particularly in language teaching contexts.

Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) remind researchers to critically examine how culture is represented in social actions, asking who introduces culture as a relevant category and for what purposes. This underscores the importance of recognizing language as inherently cultural, shaping how individuals think, act, and feel. Language is central to cultural identity, paralleling the role of nationality or religion in group identity. Hymes (1974) also highlights the symbolic role of language in cultural identity and social interaction, supporting Fishman's argument about the reciprocal relationship between language and culture.

For educators, understanding the deep connections between language and culture is essential. Language use in the classroom must be carefully considered to facilitate acculturation processes and provide students with opportunities to engage with their own and foreign cultures. Byram and Feng (2004) and Baker (2012) emphasize the importance of integrating culture and language learning, providing practical strategies for fostering intercultural competence. Kramsch (1993) and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) further explore how language education can promote intercultural awareness and competence, reinforcing Fishman's view of language as a tool for cultural exchange. By integrating these insights, teachers can design meaningful intercultural learning experiences that leverage the interplay of language and culture.

5. DESCRIBING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The field of intercultural communication gained prominence after World War II, when the Allied powers, led by the United States, occupied former Axis nations like Germany and Japan. These occupations required extensive political, societal, and cultural reforms to rebuild these nations under democratic leadership. Manuals for occupation soldiers and studies commissioned by the U.S. Office of War Information, such as Benedict (1946) are among the earliest works classified as "cross-cultural communication." Benedict's study aimed to understand Japanese culture for the occupation forces, reflecting a one-way flow of information to achieve specific goals. This approach, rooted in power dynamics, laid the foundation for early intercultural communication studies. Taking Benedict's work as a starting point, this evolution of intercultural communication through the 20th and 21st centuries is traced, highlighting shifts in perception, goals, and practice.

As Ting-Toomey (1999) notes, early intercultural communication studies were often driven by political and economic agendas, focusing on understanding "the other" to facilitate control or cooperation. This top-down approach, while instrumental in establishing the field, often overlooked the agency of the cultures being studied.

5.1. Classical Approaches

Early works in intercultural communication, such as Benedict's, were classified as "cross-cultural communication," emphasizing the need to "cross" a gap between cultures. This focus on contrast is evident in Benedict's description of the Japanese as a people of contradictions: "both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite" (Benedict, 1946). This account reflects a one-sided, American perspective, judging Japanese behavior against American values without mutual dialogue. The flow of information was unidirectional, with the Americans studying the "foreign" culture while the Japanese remained passive subjects.

A shift in perception occurred when American forces observed the behavior of Japanese prisoners of war, who demonstrated unexpected trustworthiness. This challenged American preconceptions and highlighted the need to understand cultural differences as dynamic and negotiable. Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) distinguish between cross-cultural and intercultural communication: the former compares distinct cultures, often equated with national groups, while the latter studies interactions between cultural groups, recognizing that behavior changes in intercultural contexts. This shift marked a move from static, contrast-focused approaches to dynamic, interaction-based understandings of culture.

Edward Hall's "Cultural Iceberg" model exemplifies classical approaches. Like an iceberg, culture is divided into visible elements (e.g., food, clothing, language) and deeper, hidden aspects (e.g., values, beliefs, norms). While the model provides a simple, visual tool for understanding cultural differences, it embodies the limitations of classical approaches. First, it treats culture as static and unchanging, ignoring its dynamic nature. Second, it emphasizes differences over interactions, reinforcing the idea of cultures as fundamentally distinct. Third, it relegates language to the surface level, overlooking its central role in cultural acquisition and exchange.

For modern intercultural communication, the iceberg model serves only as an introductory tool. Baker (2015a) notes that Hall's model fails to account for the fluid, interactive role of language in shaping cultural understanding. Moreover, Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) warn against viewing cultures as homogeneous, national entities, advocating instead for a focus on points of convergence.

Holliday (2011) critiques Hall's model for its reliance on national stereotypes, arguing that it perpetuates a "cultural essentialism" that ignores the diversity and hybridity within cultures. Instead, Holliday proposes a "small culture" approach, which focuses on localized, situational interactions rather than broad cultural generalizations.

Hofstede (1980) cultural dimensions theory is often referenced in intercultural communication studies, though it has been critiqued for its static view of culture. Hofstede's framework, which includes dimensions such as power distance, individualism-collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, provides a useful starting point for comparing cultures. However, critics argue that it oversimplifies cultural complexity and fails to account for intra-cultural diversity and change over time (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010).

5.2. Modern Approaches

Replacing cross-cultural studies, intercultural communication studies represent a paradigm shift in how cultures and their interactions between each other are viewed. Cross-cultural studies focus on interactions between whole cultures; therefore, individuals need to be grouped together and represented through generalized assumptions. The dangers of stereotypes were omnipresent in cross-cultural studies. In contrast, intercultural communication highlights individuals negotiating cultural or linguistic differences that may be perceived as relevant by at least one party in the interaction in order to achieve their communication goals (Zhu, 2014).

Focusing on individuals and their interactions also provides more personal situations in which learners can closely connect and empathize with the behavior of someone in a different culture. These interactions represent

different stakes, values, and beliefs that need to be bridged in order to understand each other (Piller, 2011). When also factoring in linguistic differences, a focus on individuals can give learners insight into successful and unsuccessful intercultural communication.

Firstly, Piller (2011) recommends not presupposing differences when examining intercultural encounters and difficulties. She critiques the simplistic view of language often adopted in intercultural communication research, which treats language as an unproblematic, static entity. Following Piller's argumentation, presupposing cultural differences can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. When we expect cultural differences, we tend to focus on them. Learners, in particular, may not critically analyze the foreign culture, as they might not see the necessity of understanding cultural differences. This tendency is reinforced by a static view of language, which may prevent students from being open to applying and renegotiating new meanings when using the target language or culture.

Baker (2015b) reminds us to critically consider why culture is presented in a particular way, what alternative presentations would be possible, and the relevance of these representations to their own experiences and perceptions. Here, Kramsch (2009) emphasizes the role of symbolic competence in intercultural communication, arguing that we must navigate not only linguistic and cultural differences but also the symbolic meanings embedded in language use. This perspective aligns with modern approaches that view culture as a dynamic, negotiated process rather than a fixed set of traits.

Gudykunst and Kim (2003) provide a comprehensive overview of intercultural communication theories and practices, focusing on interactions between cultural groups. They emphasize the importance of reducing uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural encounters, which can be achieved through mindful communication and cultural adaptation strategies akin to Berry (1997) acculturation theory. Their work bridges classical and modern approaches, offering practical strategies for improving intercultural understanding.

5.3. Difficulties in Intercultural Communication

The globalized society of tomorrow presents numerous challenges, particularly as migration and digitalization continue to reshape cultural boundaries. Intercultural communication is no longer limited to occasional encounters during travel but has become a fundamental aspect of daily life. With international teams collaborating virtually and personal relationships extending across the globe, individuals must navigate increasingly multicultural and plurilingual interactions. This shift raises important questions about how communication can be effective in digital environments and how individuals negotiate their identities in diverse and complex cultural contexts (Brunner, 2021).

Brunner's introduction to his work Understanding Intercultural Communication highlights both the need and the difficulties that can arise when communicating in intercultural settings. . The constant influx of information from diverse sources challenges individuals, particularly students, to develop skills that enable them to filter relevant information and critically engage with different perspectives. These processes inevitably shape personal identities and influence perceptions of others, reinforcing the need for understanding intercultural communication.

This paper has already highlighted the recurring problem that faces intercultural communication. Scollon and Wong Scollon (2001) reinforce that there is little agreement on the actual definition of culture. As cultures do not communicate with each other;but their members do, the concept of "intercultural communication" as an independent phenomenon is inherently problematic. For Scollon and Wong Scollon, all intercultural communication is therefore interpersonal communication. To counterbalance their argument, intercultural communication can be described as a special form of interpersonal communication between members of different cultural groups (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

As the English language emerged as the dominating global language (Graddol, 2006) individuals are faced with complex and dynamic worldviews that test their own perceptions to their limits. Corbett (2022) further outlines that foreign learners of English and native English speakers do not necessarily share the same worldview, as English moves from a foreign language to a lingua franca, with a departure from native speaker norms in favor of communication with speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Pennycook (2007) argues that the global spread of English as a lingua franca complicates intercultural communication, as it often carries with it implicit power dynamics and cultural assumptions from native English speaking countries. He advocates for a critical approach to English language teaching that acknowledges these complexities and encourages learners to reflect on their own cultural positioning.

Holliday et al. (2010) offer a critical perspective on intercultural communication, challenging essentialist views of culture and emphasizing the fluid, negotiated nature of cultural identities. Their work encourages learners and practitioners to move beyond stereotypes and explore the complexities of intercultural interactions in diverse contexts, such as language, identities and cultural assumptions.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the various relationships between culture, language, and intercultural communication, bringing special attention to their fluid and interconnected nature. Synthezing major cultural theories and uniting them with Baker (2015a) categorization of culture as product, discourse, practice, ideology, and a result of globalization, the complexities of defining and understanding culture has become apparent, as well recent criticism to over extensive labelling as anything human as culture. Language emerged as a majorΩ force in shaping cultural identity, and facilitating communication within and between cultures. The relationship between language and culture is not unidirectional and static, but reciprocal and fluid, requiring intensive interrogation of constituents and intentions in intercultural communication.

The evolution of intercultural communication studies was traced from its origins in post-World War II cross-cultural research to modern, interaction-focused approaches. Early works, such as Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, showcased the limitations of cross-cultural studies, which often treated cultures as monolithic and static entities. Edward Hall's "Cultural Iceberg" model, while useful for illustrating surface and deep cultural elements, also reflected the shortcomings of classical approaches by overlooking the dynamic role of language and interaction.

Modern intercultural communication studies represent a paradigm shift, focusing on individual interactions and the negotiation of cultural and linguistic differences. This approach avoids the pitfalls of stereotyping and generalization, encouraging individuals to critically engage with cultural representations and reflect on their own experiences. The need for intercultural communication in a globalized world stems from various sources, such as increased digitalization, migration, and economic codependency of nations highlight the necessity for being proficient in communicating across cultural borders in the 21st century.

The role of English as a global lingua franca both complicates and enriches this process, enabling intercultural exchanges between speakers from diverse regions while requiring careful attention to avoid linguistic colonization by the English language. By moving beyond static, national frameworks and embracing the dynamic, interconnected nature of cultures, individuals are given the cognitive, emotional and behavioral tools to participate in a globalized world.

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