

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The analysis presented in Chapter 5 seems to clearly indicate that differences in world view do exist between the two groups of Chinese students in the present study. From a total of fifteen questions based on seven textual and two pictorial stimuli, data shows that nine of the items revealed marked differences in the world view of the two groups of Chinese students. To recapitulate, the following are issues which revealed marked differences in the study: wildlife, importance of food, idea of home, propensity of Chinese to speak in the opposite, public discipline, spinsterhood, idea of a happy family as well as position and role of husbands.

#### **6.1 Summary of Findings**

Boas (1911) in his classic attack on the identification of race and culture concluded that there is no foundation whatsoever for the equation of race and culture. Herskovits (1965:10) in a reassessment of Boas's contribution, pointed out that "the very concept of race (represents) a "scientific dead-end" in the task of explanation of culture. The results obtained in the study seem to bear out these scholars' claims.

It is clear from the study that differences exist in the world view of the Chinese students with differing first languages. One social fact in Malaysia is that although we divide culture along ethnic lines, it in fact may not be the case as attested by findings in this study. According to Tannen (1977), individuals approach the world and observe events and objects in the world in relation to their conceptual frames and background. An individual's prior knowledge takes the form of expectation of the world, or as Romaine (1994) calls, "conventions" which enable the individual to arrive at an interpretation consistent with the available alternatives. This is evident in the interpretation of events and situations by the two groups of Chinese students where culture specific world view resulted because of difference in psychological orientation discussed in the previous chapter.

While the data seems to affirm clearly the relationship between language and culture in the Chinese orientation of Group 1 students and the Western orientation of Group 2 students, the data also reveals patterns of response that suggest the complexities of life where the language-culture relationship is embedded in a multilingual, multicultural context and seepage from other cultures enrich and complicate identities. Ling (1995) attributes this to the fact that Malaysian Chinese, largely second and third generations Chinese immigrants, have adopted some traits and customs of the locals in responding to local needs and conditions. However, adaptation levels among the local Chinese may differ from individual to individual depending on their locale. A Kelantanese Chinese, for example, who lives in the East coast, may differ

from a Chinese who dwells in Ipoh with regard to their degree of interaction with other races and their openness to other cultures. Therefore, multiple conceptualizations of the same events are possible even among individuals who share the same first language or among those communicating in a common language, as observed in the study conducted.

Findings from the study confirmed that distinct differences in the world view or *weltanschauung* of the two groups of Chinese subjects in the study may be attributed to their language which is closely tied to their culture. Since subjects in this study are Chinese by ethnicity, they are united along racial lines, but findings from the study indicate that they are divided by their first language. Sapir (1931) disagreed that language is a transparent medium for the transmission of thought. According to Brown (1980), cultural patterns, customs and culture specific world views are conveyed through language. Therefore, it stands to reason that different languages give access to different cultural patterns and ways of life. The first language of the Chinese students predisposed them to either English or Chinese cultural patterns and preferences. For instance, the Chinese students admitted that they preferred to read Chinese reading materials, listen to Chinese songs and stories on the radio and watch Chinese movies on television. The above occurred even though they have access to an abundant supply of reading materials in English and Malay as well as to the many programmes in English and Malay on radio and television. Likewise, the Chinese students with Malaysian English as their first language have a preference for things in English.

Other determining factors which may influence their world view include environmental factors such as the locale and speech community which serve to reinforce their culture. Subjects for the study came from different locales. The first group of subjects came from Sekinchan, a predominantly Chinese town in a semi-urban area of Selangor. Group 1 subjects attended a Chinese National Type School where Mandarin is a subject in the school curriculum. Mandarin is also spoken widely in their homes, school and by the Sekinchan speech community. It can be seen that their cultural influence is absorbed through Chinese education and exposure primarily to Chinese culture and Chinese ways of living. It is also transmitted through the mass media and being embedded in a primarily ethnic society which reinforces their cultural orientation.

In contrast, Group 2 subjects have Malaysian English as their first language and acquired Mandarin or other Chinese dialects later at school or elsewhere. They live in an urban centre such as Kuala Lumpur and are exposed to primarily Western culture. Access to western culture is through exposure to the western media, schools, parents and the intercultural speech community [comprising of Malays, Indians, Caucasians, Indonesians and Phillipinos] of Kuala Lumpur. Findings by Thiayaga Rajah (1990) suggest that English is an urban phenomenon in the Malaysian society. Thiayaga Rajah states that this is due to the urban learner receiving the support of increased exposure, parental encouragement and private tuition while the semi-urban and rural learners face severe handicaps as they function in environments lacking in all

these factors. The environment of the subjects such as their home, school and community serve to enhance and reinforce the cultural orientation of the two groups of subjects. This is evident in the importance placed on societal norms and expectations by Group 1 subjects which were culture-specific. As Skillings and Dobbins (1991) contend, one cannot exist in society without being influenced by the world views and biases of the society.

## **6.2 General Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication**

Candlin (1981) proposes that there is a necessity for negotiation of meaning and maximising the speaker's "competence" in intercultural communication. The findings of the present study are in line with the guidelines outlined by Candlin and are summarized below.

### **1. A sense of self is essential.**

Important factors to consider are race, gender, nationality, age and socio-economic status as well as belief systems and values as these do not change when one uses English. This is because English represents many cultures and can be used as a means to express any cultural heritage and any value systems. Therefore when negotiating across cultures, it is crucial to have a sense of self in negotiating meaning. The Chinese students in the study tended to interpret situations and events according to their cultural orientation. This is seen in the response given by Group 1 students

with regard to issues on food, marriage, home and views on appropriate behaviour patterns. One's language is not inextricably tied to one particular culture.

**2. A sense of other is essential when communicating cross-culturally.**

For effective communication, one needs to know and understand as much as possible the one whom one communicates. In the use of English one needs to have a knowledge of the discourse strategies of the prospective other. Findings from the study have shown that students with L1 Chinese were more subtle and indirect than students with English as their L1. Group 1 subjects emphasized giving "face" to their interactants. Thus, they refrained from pushing their ideas or openly criticizing people in public as they were mindful of the people with whom they interact. This discourse strategy is useful when communicating cross-culturally with people of other races.

**3. A sense of relationship between self and the other.**

Use of discourse strategies is dependent on the degree of distinction between the interlocutors. The interlocutor's status relative to each as well as the social distance between them are important factors to note. One does not speak to a stranger and an old friend in the same manner. Accurate assessment of the

relationship between self and the other will perhaps determine the discourse strategies to be used, thus having the greatest impact on negotiation of meaning across cultures. Findings from the study also revealed that Group 1 students spoke of according respect to their elders by greeting them. The elders were, however, not expected to return the greetings. Subject C3 from Group 1 for instance, spoke of adjusting one's speech according to the age of her hearer. To the elders she would be more conservative in her speech but to her peers, she would choose to speak freely. This strategy is not only useful in intracultural communication but also in intercultural communication.

### **6.3 Classroom Implications**

Findings from the present study showed that it is quite possible to learn a language without learning its culture. Although Group 1 Chinese students were taught English as a second language in the Malaysian classroom, it did not seem to be concomitant of second culture learning. The world view of Group 1 students appear to verify the above observation. Therefore the need exists to address the issue of culture in language teaching/learning in the Malaysian context. It would then allow for a close examination of what constitutes second language learning by placing it in the dimension of culture. As mentioned earlier, culture learning is not a discardable option in language learning. Consequently, Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) are of the opinion that

culture should not be regarded only as a support to language teaching but it should be given the same emphasis as foreign [or second] language teaching.

Since there exists a multiracial student population in the Malaysian classroom, the language teacher has to bear the above class composition in mind as well as maintain an intercultural perspective in the teaching of English.

Dunnet, Dubin and Lezerg (1986) advocate the following measures for the EFL teacher in order to maintain an intercultural perspective in language teaching: Students must be encouraged to maintain their own cultural identity while they are being introduced to British and or American literature. To do so, the teacher must be prepared to talk about cultural relativism as well as the universality of certain aspects shared by different cultures.

Cultural discussions should be guided by the teacher so that students do not become judgmental about certain cultures being superior or inferior. Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) are of the opinion that development of students' cultural awareness will enrich students' experience and sensitize them to the fact that although there has been a globalization in some cultural elements, diversity among cultures still exist.

The following are findings from the present study which have implications for language teaching and learning. These issues have also been highlighted by Althen (1981) and summarized in the following page.



1. Language cannot be translated word-for-word. All languages have idiomatic expressions which carry connotations that are above and beyond the meaning of the separate words themselves. Findings in the study indicated that the Chinese students with Chinese as their L1 utilized idiomatic expression in the Chinese language when communicating in English. They talk of "eating salt more than rice" to symbolize that elders have more experience, "a house full of relatives and grandsons" to symbolize fulfillment and success of an elderly person in having a house full of descendants, "water flow out don't come back" to symbolize the "loss" of a daughter in marriage.
2. All cultures have taboo topics. Part of knowing a language is knowing what one can and cannot say, when to say what and to whom. Findings from the study indicated that one of the major reasons for the Chinese subjects to constantly speak in the opposite was to appear humble as open praises to self are taboo and not encouraged. Self is not given prominence in their conversation. Instead, they tend to elevate the status of others while lowering their own status.

(Althen, 1981:57-69)

#### **6.4 Implications for Future Study**

As this study is exploratory in nature, it is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive in nature. It is hoped that this study will lead to further research on

the role of language and culture in determining world view which will have implications for communications as well as the teaching and learning of English as a second language. Since Malaysia is a multicultural, multilingual and multireligious society, it represents a rich ground for research into the complexities of culture and its role in determining world view.

Another area which the researcher felt warrants further study is in the area of code-switching. Findings from the study indicate significant differences in the use of language between the two groups of subjects. Group 2 subjects seldom code-switch between English and Malay language. Group 1 subjects, however, tended to code-switch frequently between Malay, Chinese and English throughout the interviews in the English language. They often revert to Chinese to state cultural practices or beliefs as well as for clarification of concepts. Their discourse also displayed substantial feature of the cMe or colloquial Malaysian English such as in the use of "lah", "one" and even "loh" which was mentioned in a study by Talif and Ting (1994). Further study could be done to verify the causes, manner and frequency of its occurrence.

As this study looked only at Chinese subjects, there is scope for research into the culture and world view of other races. Furthermore, the data is based on a sample size of ten students, therefore, a reduplication with a greater number of students would perhaps provide further information about the language-culture relationship. In sum, it is hoped that this study will be a stepping stone to other related studies.

## 6.5 Concluding Remarks

The Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis has few ardent supporters today. Brown (1986) is of the opinion that linguists today have little concern about whether language shapes thought or thought shapes language. Instead, Brown (1986) is of the view that they are more interested in the fact that language and culture interact and that world views among cultures differ as well as the notion that the language used to express that world view may be relative and specific to that view. Although Whorf's ideas have encountered increasing skepticism, Cole and Scribner (1974) is of the opinion that in the field of investigation of how individuals utilize language for social communication and as a tool for thought, Whorf still lives. Schlesinger (1991) shares a similar view when he states that Whorf's ideas have exerted and continues to exert great influence in the field of contemporary anthropological research and psychological research. Findings from this particular study seem to corroborate with the idea that there is a profound relationship between culture, language and world view. Although there may be other determining factors which contribute to the said relationship, it cannot be denied that language to a certain extent influences thought and world view as attested by findings of the present study.