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THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CULTURAL STUDIES: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to study the role of language in Cultural Studies from critical point of view. It also endeavors to throw a light on how identities are constructed through language. Cultural studies analyses the practices through which meaning are formed in a particular culture. It considers that the practices of signification are related to the structures of power in society. This practice of signification (meaning-making), Cultural Studies terms representation. Meanings are the practices of language. Language and meaning are related to the issues of class, caste, gender, nation, ethnicity, power and ideology in which interpretation happens. All manifestation and use of language are located in a context. This context is discourse.As an interdisciplinary academic field of study, Cultural Studies draws on various theories such as Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism, structuralism, post- structuralism, ethnic studies, media studies, film studies, etc. Identity, subjectivity, discourse and representation are the key concept used in Cultural Studies.

Key Words: Language, Cultural Studies, Culture, Identity, Subjectivity, Discourse, Representation

Cultural studies has originated in the two seminal books entitled, The Uses of Literacy (1957) by Richard Hoggart and Culture and Society (1958) by Raymond Williams. Gaining currency with the establishment of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies by Richard Hoggart along with Stuart Hall at the Department of English in the Birmingham University in 1964, Cultural Studies evinces anti- essentialism, anti-foundationalism and anti-establishment. With the advent of globalization it has broaden its horizon to trans-cultural studies vis-à-vis literature. Kenneth Womack pours new insight pertaining to the nature of Cultural Studies as:

> Cultural studies manifests itself in a wide array of interpretative
> dimensions, including such intersecting fields of inquiry as gender studies,
> post colonialism, race and ethnic studies, pedagogy, eco criticism, the

politics of nationalism, popular culture, postmodernism and historical criticism, among a variety of topics. (Wolfreys243).

There is an interrelation between Society and language. Language takes birth in the society. It is conserved by the society with a great vigor. Language is an effective weapon of the society which comes from the dealings of the individual. It has got paramount importance because many elements of the society are associated with it. Christopher Caudwell candidly says: "Language is a social product". This means that language is an offspring of the society through which society is interconnected like blood relations.

As a person born, language was also born. It not only gives essence to the human life but also performs a great role for reaching human life to the splendid direction. It manifests into the various forms in human life. For example: Literature has its own special language, in the same way business too and so on. Language is skillfully used by the society for the purpose of 'give and take' in human life. Volosinov argues that "language has to be understood in social context and in social activity" (Longhurst43).Words are key components of any language. It creates various types of facets of meanings. The words have their origin in the society. They give importance to the language and society endows them recognition. In language, there are three powers of words, First 'Abhidha' (denotative), second is the 'Lakshna' (indicative) and the third one is the 'Vyanjana' (Suggesting). These powers are employed by the society according to the circumstances and suitable occasions. The peculiarity of language is revealed through these three powers of words.

Language is a system of signs having itself a cultural value. In Du Gay opinion, "Language is the use of a set of signs or a signifying system to represent things and exchange meaning about them" (15). Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity that"is produced from the cultural and social contexts in which we find ourselves and from which we draw certain assumptions and for this reason identity can be defined as 'individuality' and the 'self' " (Giles30). The identity of a person is basically 'what is privileged?' Identity is determined by several external authorities and by others. These controls consist of language, meaning and bond with others.

It is pertinent to say that since the inception of human civilization, language has played vital role in the making of identity, whether that identity is of individual person, family, community, caste, religion, race, ethnicity or the nation.

By eschewing traditional practices and conventional signs, language is used in the society. Only that language keeps its existence forever which breaks all traditional rules. Society should always maintain its fluidity because the fluidity of language depends on it. One comes to know about the structure of caste and religion on the basis of languages that are existed or spoken in the society. Therefore, it is essential to strive endlessly for creating classless and casteless society. Then language will manifest into a new way.

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Otherwise stability will arise in the language and will give the clear identity of the caste and religion.

Change is the rule of nature. The frequency in which society constantly changes, in the same way language should keep on changing. Otherwise, there might be a chance of arising monotony in the language .Raymond Williams aptly remarks,

> And, since this grasping is social and continuous (as distinct from the abstract encounters of 'man ' and 'his world ' or 'consciousness' and 'reality' or 'language' and 'material existence') , it occurs within an active and changing society(37).

There is not only need but the propriety of time that society must persistently try to update the language. One must keep in mind that there is nothing can be 'pure' or 'impure' pertaining to language. When one thinks about purity or impurity of language it means that society rejects that language.

When one comes in contact with other language it does not mean that one loses his/her mother tongue. It will not be detrimental to the mothers tongue that when one uses code-mixing because language is an effective medium of communication. On the other hand, this act contributes to the growth of language. Those who deliberately avoid other languages must take into cognizance the above view. There are many components of the society who

use their own dialects. Having meanness regarding any dialects is nothing but the symptom of uncivilized life. Cultural Studies echoes the same thing.

Language is a principal concern of culture and cultural studies. It is the means and medium for the generation of significance or meaning. It is only through language that one can have meaning. Chris Barker further says:

> Following the influence of structuralism within cultural studies, the investigation of culture has often been regarded as virtually interchangeable with the exploration of meaning produced symbolically through signifying systems that work 'like a language'. To hold that culture works 'like a language' is to argue that all meaningful representations are assembled and generate meaning with essentially the same mechanisms as a language. That is, the selection and organization of signs into texts which are constituted through a form of grammar. An essentialist or referential understanding of language argues that signs have stable meanings that derive from their enduring referents in the real. In that way, words refer to the essence of an object or category which they are said to reflect. Thus the metaphor of the mirror is to the fore in this conception of language (107).

Conversely, for the anti-essentialist interpretation of language that enlightens cultural studies, language is a system of differential signs that produce meaning through

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phonetic and conceptual metamorphosis. Therefore, meaning is relational and unstable rather than referential, permanent and stable. Eschewing the essentialist notionof the stable structures of language. Derrida endorses indeterminacy of meaning. Post-structuralism envisages that meaning cannot be restricted to single words, sentences or particular texts but is the outcome of interactions between texts; Kristeva terms it 'intertextuality'. For Derrida, meaning can never be 'permanent'; rather words carry multiple meanings including the echoes or traces of meanings from related words.

Language, a means of communication, it could be visual such as writing, print, cinema, etc.,audio such as music, speech, etc., gestural such as hand waving, body sport, or a unification of all of them. Language constructs a set of meanings for us, which we then can deal out with the world. It is not an echo to reality but construct this reality for us. It creates our identity for us. 'Subjectivity' can be defined as a person's understandings of the world. It suggests person is first and foremost concerned with assigning personal experiences, feelings and beliefs. It determines person's individual option and is about her/his beliefs, tastes emotional desires and personality behavior. It may be true that "Language both represents and constitutes the class" (Longhurst 45).For instance, when we talk about marginalized people's class and social structure, we come to know thattheir beliefs and perceptions are shaded by the condition where they are slave for others, are shunned by others or exploit others. Their subjectivity is the outcome of their social condition where their identity is centered on their relation with others.

The argument, therefore on the subjectivity is important. Objectivity is seriously questionable in cultural studies. There are no subjective truths but there can only be justification. Knowledge is a matter of being able to justify. How do we define the term epistemology? According to Merriam Webster Dictionary 'epistemology' is "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity"(www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epistemology on 01/01/2016). There may be diverse ways in which we can get knowledge, for in a sense nationalism is one way in which knowledge may be constructed and terrorism is another way. So far as knowledge production and meaning making are concerned in cultural studies, it all rests on how one justifies a belief. There is a distinction between belief and knowledge. The belief cannot be called knowledge unless it justified. So, knowledge is defined as justified belief. Cultural studies states that, in a scenario where we can never have objective truths because everything is a representation and representations are made by human being in a certain condition of knowledge. Representation is one of the key concepts in cultural studies. It has been pointed out,

> This requires us to explore the textual generation of meaning. It also demanded investigation of the modes by which meaning is produced in a variety of context. That is, they are embedded in sounds, inscriptions, objects, and images, books, magazines and television programmes. They are produced, enacted, usedand understood in specific

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context (www.sagepub.in/books/Books235499/toc.on 12/12/2015).

Cultural Studies, therefore, postulates that all we can do is only put forward justifications and justifications are represented through one medium which is language.

Cultural studies methodology prompts us that what is being designated is not just difference but hierarchies of status which are frequently also hierarchies of power. Street argues that "the use of the word 'one' as in 'one knows' implies status; the use of the word 'we' express solidarity but when used by a doctor as in and how are we feeling today ? It can imply power and status" (71).

> Classical economics, for example, is a product of the capitalist socio-economic system that, despite obvious limitations due to its origin, has achieved a distinctive body of knowledge that would not exist without capitalism. Further, knowledge can have a transforming effect on the power structures that give rise to it. For example, governments that claim justification on the basis of a given body of knowledge (for example, of a people's history) can be challenged on the basis of those facts. Think of the political significance in Israel of new archaeological findings that can be interpreted supporting or undermining Biblical claims about the early Judaic nation (Gutting 51).

Language plays a decisive role in making of the construction of identities possible. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure postulated that language incorporates two components: "Language system which pre-exists actual examples of language (langue), is the social aspect (unconsciously) draw upon as speakers and the individual utterance (parole), is the individual realization of the system in actual instances of language" (Seldom and Widowson73).

Parole, therefore, is the human factor of language. This means that the use of words and choice of language rely to a large extent on the individual speaker in a particular social and cultural context. Language is cultural, not natural, and so the meanings it generates are too (Turner 11). It has been pointed out,

> The insights contained within Saussure's theory of language have relevance beyond linguistics because they reveal to us the mechanisms through which we make sense of our world. Specific social relations are defined through the place language allocates them within its system of relations such an explanation of language endows it with enormous determining power. Reality is made relative, while the power of constructing 'the real' is attributed to the mechanisms of language within culture. Meaning is revealed to be culturally grounded-even culturally specific. Different cultures may not only use different language systems but they may also, in a definitive sense, inhabit different worlds.

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Language defines us as man or woman, girl or boy, rich or poor, oriental or occidental, old or young, low caste or high caste and so on. Subjectivity and identity are based on difference. I am a 'student' because I am not a principal, a teacher, a librarian, a clerk and other staff of the college or I am not a Ramesh, Raju, Rani and my other classmate in the college. The only way I can differentiate myself is by showing how I am not somebody else, how I am different from somebody else. Therefore, my identity is based on my difference from others. In other words, Subjectivity is also restricted and controlled by culture.

Culture takes many forms and techniques to define the subject's subject position. Contemporary cultural theory evinces some cultural context that determines a person's subject position. These are by the structure of the law, and which, therefore grant particular identities to us when we go to court, we are either 'plaintiffs' or 'defendants', when we experience a crime, we are victims (Kundu and Nayar24).

Culture is about the association of a connotation i.e. meaning we agree on certain things such as Ambulance Lamp, Traffic Signal, the idea of India, Gandhi, Football, Cricket, Abhitabh Bachan, Amir Khan, Sania Mirza and So on. Culture is about the role and job of meaning in any society. But meanings are never permanent; they are persistently being negotiated and distorted. For example: I am Dharmapal to my family members such as mother, father, brother, sister etc. But I am Dharmapal Fulzele, an Assistant professor for everyone in the college and Academics circles.

'Meanings' are process of language where language incorporate not just words or print but other forms of expression such as speech, painting, photography, cinema, music and so on. Language and meaning are linked to the issues of class, power, ideology and material conditions in which the expression occurs. All expression and use of language are positioned in a particular social, political and economic context. This context is called discourse. J. A. Cuddon describes the term 'Discourse' as: "a learned discussion spoken or written on a philosophical, political, literary or religious topic (228).

Discourses, therefore, are structure of powers that determine what is said or written and engender particular meanings/identities. Identity is the outcome of representation (use of language), and the result of discourse. For example: when we talk about Marathi language in Maharashtra, 'Puneri Marathi' has been called the standard dialect because Western Maharashtra people have to retain their dominance in state politics. In order to sustain the hegemonic dominance of Western Maharashtra, they project 'Puneri Marathi' as a standard Marathi and 'Vidarbha Marathi' especially 'Zadiboli' is secondary. It means that identity of western Maharashtra people leads to advancement and that of Vidarbha people leads to backwardness. This is a politics and ideology of the dominant class for considering particular

dialect as a standard dialect. There can be nothing 'standard' or 'pure' regarding any language or dialect.

Contemporary Cultural Studies claims that there is nothing natural and everything

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is constructed. Therefore, Cultural Studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power. Besides, Cultural studies research often focuses on how particular phenomenon relates to matter of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class and gender. The identities are based on cultural context of: gender, class, caste, age, religion, ethnicity, nationality and race. These are context in which one is identified as male, female, Tamil, Indian, 18 years of age, labor, Middle class, Youth, College Student and so on. These contexts give one his/her identity. Identity is based on multiple cultural contexts. It is not a quality that is inherent or stable inside us.

Girls assimilate characters of 'feminine' because they are brought up within the discourse of femininity. Discourse is the context in which a culture's message, communication, meaning-production, understanding and interpretation occur. For example: Male dominated society introduces and develops the notions of femininity and masculinity among the children. The roles they will act upon as they grow up are unmistakably demarcated from childhood. The relation between the genders is strong-willed in progress: women will be in charge of the home while the men will go out to work. When we think about gender in language and the discourse of gender we come to know about two common 'meanings' of girls are: that girls are weaker and delicate and that grooming and care are feminine qualities/ duties. Edwin Ardener aptly remarks in this regard that "women are often more "inarticulate" than men by which he meant that the arenas of public discourse are typically dominated men and the language of public discourse is 'encoded' with male meanings" (1974 viii). It implies that women must fight to be heard and that they must learn male language. It has been said that:

> Books like Robin Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place* (1975) and Dale Spender's *Man-Made Language* (1981) focus on the gender bias in language. Lakoff's book is more descriptive; she says that women use more question tags (like 'you are pretty', aren't you?) and hedges like 'well, you know' etc. Since they are unclear or uncertain about what they say. Spender's work is more critical; in her book she points out that the masculine gender in English has not only been stable but also dominant. She compares words like mister-mistress
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> (an illegal one), sir-madam (a brothel keeper), governor-governess (a tutor in a private house), courtier-courtesan (a woman who takes payment for 'services' rendered), wizard-witch (derogatory), etc. and shows how the feminine gender has a lesser value in each pair. The process of 'semantic degeneration' in words that denote the feminine gender reflects the process of control through language (N. Krishnaswamy76).

The patriarchic discourses give attributes to women as weaker, gentler and need protection and safety and to be given only particular tasks such as cooking, cleaning clothes, cleaning utensils and caring for children. Moreover, when an innocent child

comes to this world if he is a male child father purchases 'gun' for him to play and if she is female child, father brings 'baby doll' for her to play. It means that identity is the result of representation as mentioned earlier. Thus, the identity of women is socially, psychologically and culturally constructed. Simon de Beauvoir, a French existentialist positioned gender as a social category and psychologically constructed as 'other', 'secondary' and 'inferior' to men. The Cultural Studies also asserts that nothing is natural, everything is constructed. Nayar pointed out,

> Feminists have consistently argued that the male becomes the standard model for all things human. The women are never seen as anything other than an object, a secondary figure to the primacy of the male. The feminist debates about subjectivity have revolved around issues live: Does subjectivity occur in the body, the psyche or the social conditioned/determined experience? and Is subjectivity Individual or social?. Further, the Individual in many societies is located within communities and groups who also contributed to her sense of self ('I belong'). Thus, subjectivity is not always located in the individual alone, but is socially validated, determined and constructed. Roles pre- ordained for women – such as mother, wife or daughter- are subject- positions into which the women need to fit themselves. This means, while the man might be able to choose his subject- position, the women is pre-determined. Feminist theory, therefore, sees subjectivity as at least partly socio- cultural (100-101).

When one talks about Indian society one comes to know that it is multi-religious and multi-caste. Consequently, it is linguistically diverse. As continuously coming aged-old tradition determines social life style, language too determines structure/ form of the society.

As a result of this, language becomes an identity of the concerned society. We come to know about the nature and linguistic culture of the 'have-nots' society from the language used bywriters of that society in their works such as Lakshaman Mane in his autobiographical novel *'Upara'*('The outsider') or Lakshaman Gaikwad in his autobiographical novel *'Uchalya'*('Petty Thief') or Sharankumar Limbale in his autobiographical novel *'Akkarmashi'*('The Outcaste').It has been pointed out that:

> Cultural Studies always fights against established capitalist culture and prevailing power structure, e.g. common masses' fight for water, farmers' fight to get good price for their crops, fight of women against patriarchy. It means that cultural studies always fight for downtrodden and marginalized. Cultural Studies is also committed to the reconstruction of society, e.g. fight of tribal for land. The condition of the tribal has to be changed, is the aim of cultural studies (Fulzele256).

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It is concluded that language acts substantial role in Cultural Studies because it is a medium for generating meaning. Representation and communication happen through language. Besides, language performs important role in making the construction of identity possible. It means that identities are constructed through language. Endorsing anti-essentialist thought, Cultural Studies believes that things are not natural but they are constructed, produced and attributed through the use of language.

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