R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 019 901 FL 000 738

OVERCOMING CULTURAL BARRIERS.

BY- BARRUTIA, RICHARD

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSN. OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

PUB DATE DEC 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.28 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- *CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, *SOCIOLINGUISTICS, *LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, *COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS, LANGUAGE, CULTURE CONFLICT, LANGUAGE HANDICAPS, CULTURE, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, PARALINGUISTICS, BEHAVIOR PATTERNS, DIALECTS, VERBAL COMMUNICATION,

THE RELATIONSHIP OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT TO CULTURAL BARRIERS AND THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE. VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE MEANING OF CULTURE ARE MENTIONED IN ORDER TO SINGLE OUT ANTHROPOLOGICAL CULTURE AS A MAIN FOCAL POINT. INTERCULTURAL DIFFERENCES ARE SPELLED OUT WITH EXAMPLES OF LINGUISTIC BARRIERS, AND INTRACULTURAL BARRIERS AMONG SUB GROUPS ARE ALSO EXPLAINED. PEDAGOGICAL PROBLEMS, TEACHERS' TASKS, LINGUISTIC SCIENCE, AND THE STUDY OF KINESICS ARE IN TURN DISCUSSED BECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNICATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "FORUM OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA," VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2, DECEMBER 1967, PAGES 6-10. (SS)

OVERCOMING CULTURAL BARRIERS*

Richard Barrutia, University of California, Irvine

How Do We Define "Culture" and "Language"

This paper will present but a brief survey of the topic of language development as it pertains to cultural barriers and the teaching of foreign languages. To begin this complex topic, we must ask ourselves: "What are some of the various views and definitions of culture and language? Too many teachers are still obsessed with the feeling that we are not teaching "culture" unless the content of our material is concerned somehow with the best literature, art, and creative output of a given civilization. The problem lies in *not* recognizing a basic duality in the term "culture."

The notion of artistic culture expressed above is commonplace enough so as not to need further clarification here, and the great value of literary studies for our future teachers and scholars is too well known by this group to require more than brief reference. But it may be worth simply recalling, as Nelson Brooks so aptly put it, "that, "Language, mundane and banal as it so often is in every day use, possesses the remarkable capacity of being able to take on at times an esthetic quality and, in the hands of the poet and writer, of being transformed into fine art. An experience with language in this transmuted form should not be denied either our teachers or their students. And, apart from literature as an end in itself, a judicious use of literary texts can add immeasurably to the success of language instruction at all levels."[1]

Another of the main interests of a foreign or native language program, however, should properly focus upon "anthropological culture," that is, the study of all the ways and mores of an entire social group. Now it is quite evident, even to the least initiated, that the greatest manifestation of the way in which any social group acts and reacts is the system of communication it uses. Further, this [redacted] to be studied should be the one the entire group uses. Those who are highly literate can, of course, communicate with those who are less so, and even those who are completely illiterate can still communicate in the most efficient and complete way ever invented — through speech. The all-pervasiveness of speech, then, is the key to a better understanding of the complete meaning of "culture." "When in Rome do as the Romans do" means not only to try to act and think like an Italian, but to understand and speak Italian. The first year language teacher teaches more culture, when it is seen in these terms, than the college professor, who is concerned not with language but mainly with illluminating (in whatever language) the highwater marks of a given civilization's literary and artistic production. The latter instructor is willing to talk about a culture, while the former is committed to a cultural behavior.

Relationships of Culture to Language

What are some of the complex relationships of culture to language (world view)? Probably one of the most exasperating chicken and egg-type conundrums arises when trying to establish a pecking order for the concept, "Does a culture create a language, or does a language create a culture?" They are certainly not independent of each other. But if they are considered separately, which one plays the greatest role in the way we see the world *(Weltanschauung)?*

We know that writing developed in progressive stages of evolution, but there is no proof that spoken language developed from primitive forms to the complex utterances we hear today in all of the world's 5,000 or so languages. In spite of this, the common misconception prevails that language originated from man's first primeval grunts and moans that eventually took the consistent shapes, which formed the words of a very primitive way of speaking. Yet on studying the Navaho and Hopi languages, various linguists have discovered extremely complex stems and interesting affixing structures, which clearly correspond to the speaker's complex world view of shapes and vibrations.

When even very young Indian children who know the Navaho language are asked to place three objects (a red ball, a red rope, and a blue stick) into two boxes, they automatically group the blue stick and the red rope together. Yet when non-Indian children of the same age are faced with the same task, they invariably group the two red items together.[2] This happens because man views his world through his language, just as much as his language is formed by the world about him. Since the Hopi and Navaho languages have morphological entities in their languages which describe shapes and vibrations, the affixations and root forms of the language itself makes them cognizant of these qualities as prime structures in the organization of their world. The white child, on the other hand, has no such linguistic structure designating shapes, neither in his language nor in his world view, so his decision to lace the two red objects together is really a rather arbitrary choice related to what "seems" to fit even in the absence of a formal language structure with categories for that particular situation. When one considers how easily observable the color difference is in this test as compared to the shape difference, it is not hard to relate the white child's action to his logical processes.

We are all familiar with the more common phenomena of optical illusions. Let's think, for instance, of that line drawing of a stairway that we can visualize in our mind's eye as moving downward. By doing a mental flip flop, we can then reverse the drawing and see it as moving upward. We can flip our mind's eye in this way back and forth, but we cannot see both pictures at once. Shown to a Jivaro Indian from the jungles of Ecuador, this same drawing would more than likely not relate to any experience and, consequently, mean no more than a design of straight lines. This is one kind of a cultural barrier.

Now, I think that the same phenomena takes place within what I would like to call the "mind's ear." We can concoct ambiguous sentences, such as, "The shooting of the soldiers is deplorable," where it takes a mental flip flop to perceive the other meaning. Another example would be, "All red ships are red." In fact, it is not hard to show that the mind's ear is even more complex than the mind's eye. Examples of this are puns or plain phrases that could conceivably take several turns, such as, "Time flies like an arrow."

Then there is the whole group of intonational and juncture signals for which we linguists use that funny word "suprasegmentals," e.g., "What's that up in the road, a-head?" Or "What are we having for dinner, mother?" An important point here is that once an idea is implanted in the mind's ear either through the surface structure or the deep structure of oral communication, it dominates our unshared attention until we willfully switch out of it. If this point has not yet been driven home, for the next five seconds would you please not think of the number 713. (pause) How are you doing?

The other important point here is that if our listener's cultural experience does not include the knowledge that red ships can be Communist ships, he cannot possibly arrive at the only meaning we may be trying in vain to convey.

Considered as the structural portion of context, then, language includes its own logic and extra logic structures. Since context and its structure (language) change, we can now characterize the change of language as a result of the

Address delivered at the Fifth Biennial Conference of The California Council of Foreign Language Teachers Associations at the International Hotel on November 5, 1967.

introduction of new experience. As this new experience can often happen to one segment of our society and not to another, linguistic change becomes another barrier which can only be overcome by broader exposure to culture.

What is Meant by Intercultural Differences?

The underlying interrelationship of language and culture requires special attention in all areas of communication, learning, and teaching. A Latin American's *machismo* might cause him to take offense to an inoffensive phrase put in a word order quite normal to English. In referring to someone compassionately, for instance, as a poor man *(pobre hombre)*, a Spanish speaker could justifiably retort: "No soy un pobre hombre, soy un hombre pobre." The latter structure means a man who is poor financially as opposed to a man who is to be pitied for whatever the reason. Many things can be misunderstood when they are interpreted through the syntax and culture of another language. This is true even between internal subcultures of the same language, such as the "soul" vernacular of the American Negro and standard English.

Language can be considered the spark plug of a sense of humor, and yet much humor is lost in intracultural exchanges. Here is an example:

Un Mexicano le dice al otro, "Cómo se dice, pos o pues?"

El otro contesta, "Pos pues."

Naturally, only those who know Spanish and with some feeling for Mexican culture (anthropological) can enjoy such an exchange. Often times all is lost in translation. When it is not, only a half understood humorous inkling is left, such as in: "Pedro, hurry home, your house is on fire." Pedro answers, "I don't care. I got the key in my pocket." Or, "Pedro, you can't open the door with a cigarette." Pedro: "Caray! I must have smoked the key." These are examples of idea exchanges. Sometimes there are intracultural combinations of sound and meaning exchanges as with the Portuguese **não.** It is said that when a Portuguese girl says **não**, she means, "No," not "Now."

I know that in these days of hypersensitivity to any manner of racial and ethnic comparisons, it is not fashionable to use dialectal exchanges even as academic examples. But let me remind you of the other side of the coin, where foreign accents are highly regarded as a desirable and life-giving characteristic of communication. The delightful English of Maurice Chevalier is a case in point. And if anyone is still in doubt, let him ask any Latin American's opinion of the late Nat King Cole's quaintly pronounced renditions of Spanish songs.

In the sense, then, of this esteem rather than derision, we can consider the English as a Second Language class where the teacher asked, "Who can tell us the meaning of 'vast'?" Mr. Kaplan answered, "Vast, its commink fromm diraction. Ve have four diractions: de naut, de sot, de heast, and de vast." The teacher explained that he had asked for 'vast' rather that 'west'. Whereupon Mr. Kaplan answered, "So is 'vast' vat you eskink? Aha! You minn 'vast' not 'vast.' Hau Kay! Ven I'm buyink a suit of clothes, I'm gettink de cawt, de pents, an' de vast!" Our present understanding of contrastive analysis makes Mr. Kaplan's pronunciation and concepts perfectly logical. When we can begin to enjoy such stories again without ridicule or shame in their telling but rather with a sincere appreciation and respect for the now better understood, cultural, and linguistic interferences involved, we will have taken another small step toward overcoming yet another of many cultural barriers.

How Deeply Intertwined Are Language and Culture?

One of the remarkable proofs we have nowadays of how deeply intertwined language and culture are can be seen in our returned Peace Corps Volunteers. These young people return speaking not the language we only began to teach them at our various training centers, but rather the vernacular of the region in which they worked. The happy result is that a typical host country observation concerning a volunteer is: "He's different, he's one of us." This amazing cultural metamorphosis comes about mostly because these volunteers are picking up the exact ways of communicating, including the jargon, nuances, and slang of their hosts.

Are not some of the problems intracultural among sub groups? Yes. Girls, for instance, are better at both imitation and generation of new language structures at an earlier age than are boys. What is more, their language is very apt to reflect a different (feminine) world view than the boys, in spite of their tender age. The difference, then, is what must be respected and not forced on any group as an imposed change from a supposed authority. It is often embarrassing for boys to have to use feminine vocabulary and vice versa for whatever the reason. When the above principles are understood, however, and presented to elicit practice in the mores of another group in order to arrive at better understanding, these language barriers become less problematic. A neat example of the masculine versus feminine view is seen in the following verse:

A woman has a figure, a man has a physique;
A father roars in rage, a mother shrieks in pique;
Broad-shouldered athletes throw what dainty damsels toss,
And female bosses supervise, male bosses boss.
Lads gulp, maids sip;
Jacks plunge, Jills dip;
Guys bark, dames snap;
Boys punch, girls slap;
Gobs swab, WAVES mop;
Braves buy, squaws shop.
A gentleman perspires, a lady merely glows;
A husband is suspicious; a wife, however, knows.

What style of language should we teach?

The perennial question of the language teacher is, "Should I not correct all dialectal speech to make it conform to a standard?" There is a great tendency on the part of all of us to answer this question affirmatively. This is so, because traditionally we have been bombarded by so many doctrines of correctness. Often times, too little attention is paid to the question of whether or not these doctrines may be false. False doctrines of correctness are imposed, for instance, when teachers insist upon the wrongness and consequent altering of a student's style or dialect, which may be perfectly acceptable wherever that dialect or style is used. That same teacher could be adding a style instead of replacing one. Our own cultural lag manifesting itself in a lack or respect for sub group differences is one of the chief causes of drop outs from both school and society.

It would be illuminating to know just how much of the communications gap between our American youth and those of us over thirty is attributable to language. What is a "good" thing for us is a "gas, groovy, cool, tough, or bitchin" for them. The pejorative "bag" which we were once left holding has now become the thing one does best. We also had our slang expressions, but today's youth are more attuned to a different drummer with many more syncopated offbeats than those we marched to—weed, acid, pot, junk, tea, speed, grass, goof balls, joints, trips, freak outs, love ins. The rhythms are endless.

An equally disturbing type of cultural barrier is seen in specialized scientific and technical jargon. A recent speech by Dr. Norman H. Topping, President of the University of Southern California, was entitled, *Needed, a Continuous Dialogue.* But to have a dialogue, the participants need a common language and Dr. Topping observed that "There seems to be no cohesive, coherent system of translating technological advances from

(Continued on Page 8)

their primary field into application in other fields on behalf of the people in general." I maintain that there is a missing language link between the sciences and the humanities that throws up still another barrier for modern society to cope with.

An idealized doctrine of correctness has always been a pitfall of even our best educational systems. What we should be concerned with instead is a standard, a nonstandard, and a substandard way of communicating. Only the substandard can be called objectionable, when it is considered unacceptable, even by the speakers within the subculture that uses that given dialect or style.

Can we overcome prejudice and shame?

It seems quite unnecessary to have to repeat the obvious. But my own observations of beginning language programs bely the obvious, so I'll hazard a platitude. In order to overcome a major kind of shame in the learner, we do not ridicule language or allow others to do so. It was not so many years ago that I observed the following statewide rule being enforced in Arizona. A teacher raced out to the playground at recess time, because she heard Spanish being spoken. She caught a little Mexican-American boy by the scruff of the neck and shaking him she said, "I thought I told you never to use that language on school grounds again."

A major problem today is to give the student pride in his own way of speech, especially if it is one of the nonstandard but acceptable dialects. Therefore, to overcome cultural barriers on a national or international basis, we must start with a sincere respect for the differences of world view which, as shown, has its greatest manifestation in the spoken language.

The project of teaching of English as a Second Language for American Negroes in Harlem is a clear example that we are finally recognizing the validity and status of their own communication as a language apart from English. One good way to give the student pride is to let him serve as a model for the rest of the class in his dialect. It is even beneficial to have the class repeat after him in his way. It is easy from that point for the teacher to say, "Now let's practice still another way," then use still another student as a model for a more standard dialect without making value judgments as to relative worth. The amount of practice dedicated to a certain type of speech and its natural predominance in society will form the learner's patterns. In fact, it is this same natural predominance that forms dialects and the constantly changing standard of styles in the first place.

Does linguistic science set the pace for defining language development?

American linguistic science has made significant strides, which bear on many disciplines and on many areas of language and culture. An important contribution was made by Drs. Brown and Berko in their study on word association and the acquisition of grammar. In that research they show clearly how children analogize to produce forms, which they have never heard before. The interesting thing about learning by analogy is that the forms produced are always correct in their own way. That is, when a child forms a plural to a word which has an irregular plural, the child's form is correct in that he does the right thing with the word in order to make it fit into one of the larger categories of words he knows. Dr. Berko's experiment is now well known wherein small children are shown a picture of a little schmoo-like figure and are told that it is a "wug." The children are asked to repeat, "It's a wug." Then they are shown a second "wug" and are asked, "Now there are two ———?" The ease with which children respond to this question and supply the plural form "wugs" shows the great power of analogy as a learning device. When a child is shown a wug, which is apparently jumping over a high bar, and he is told that the wug is glinging, then if he is asked to complete the phrase, "Yesterday he ———," the answer will invariably be, "Yesterday he glinged."[3]

On a higher level, students are also able to match syntactic regularities so that they are able to produce whole phrases which they have never heard before. It is the observation of precisely this phenomenon that has led many to the acceptance of the stimulus free response theory of Noam Chomsky as opposed to the purely S——R behavioral views of B. F. Skinner. Recent work in this area addresses differing linguistic philosophies, which give rise to separate methodological approaches to language development. The pendulum at some points of the recent past may have swung too far for a short period, but only because it was seeking its true balance. Sound methods must be based on sound theories, and enough light has now been shed on both sides of the pedagogical argument so that a single catalytic agent could create the proper emulsion.

In Noam Chomsky's recent gem of reason, *Cartesian Linguistics,* he deftly unravels some heretofore tangled thoughts concerning linguistic history and man's relationship to language structure. The arguments between the cognitive and behavioral approaches to communication are laid at the feet of their respective authors. Doing so clearly delineates the now-considered "old school" starting with Descartes, Humboldt, etc. (Cartesian linguistics terminates with the classic work of Humboldt), and confronts it with the newer theories of most American descriptivists. The arguments Chomsky makes, just as in his rebuttal to B. F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior,* are clear. They cut cleanly as a knife, right down to the bone, revealing that deep structures exist which are too often neglected in the method suggested by the descriptive school.

It certainly must be recognized as a grievous omission that many of our most modern methods do not take into account that the underlying organization of a sentence relevant to semantic interpretation is not necessarily revealed by the actual arrangement and phrasing of its given components. This underlying abstract structure that determines semantic interpretation is what Chomsky calls "deep structure." The superficial organization of units, which determines the phonetic interpretation, he labels "surface structure." The cognitive ability to grasp deep structures, Chomsky cogently argues, is a unique predisposition of mankind.[4] The pedagogical implications of these important theories run deep and right to the heart of textbook writing and teacher training. Methods in which the "deep structure" predisposition of our students can best be activated and fused as an adjunct to the behavioral methods should constitute an equitable portion of future linguistic research.

Future Linguistic Research: Kinesics

Another area for future linguistic research, which is perhaps as closely related to cultural behavior as verbal signaling, is that of kinesics, or the study of patterned body motions as communication, as exemplified in the request of the Italian listener to his partner: "Eh! torn ona da lights. Ah kena see whata you say!" Following the emic and etic duality discovered in other forms of communication, Ray L. Birdwhistell "has arrived at the *kine,* the smallest unit of perceivable action, analogous to *phone;* the *kineme,* a range of kines which may be substituted for each other without changing the general interactional sequence, analogous to *phoneme;* the *allokine,* a member of a kineme, analogous to *allophone;* the *kinemorph,* a complex of abstract motion particles from more than one body area, analogous to *morph;* the *kinemorpheme,* a class of mutually substitutable kinemorphs, analogous to morpheme; and the *allokinemorph,* a member of a kinemorpheme, analogous to *allomorph.*[5] (If that formidable array of specialized jargon means little to you, allow me to demonstrate a kinesic conversation within the Mexican culture.) (A short pantomime here)

(Continued on Page 9)

Many cultural barriers lie hidden in our gestures, because so little is known about them. It would probably shock many of you here now if I were to bless you with the same symbol that Dante used with both hands to the heavens in his blasphemous tirade against God. Yet in Brazil and Africa, the sign of the *figa* is a symbol of good luck and protection much like our rabbit's foot.

What are some of the biological implications in language acquisition?

While a given language obviously cannot be acquired by infants in the absence of a speaking person of that language, social contacts serve only as the trigger of innately developing mechanisms. In support of this view are the regularly successsive stages that young children go through regardless of outside circumstances. Crying in all infants is followed by cooing and then babbling, which is regarded as the first true language because phoneme units can be distinguished in its intonational pattern. Single words are uttered between the ages of twelve and eighteen months, followed by two-word combinations which are not random compositions but constitute a primitive subject-predicate organization. They are not imitations of adult speech but indicate that certain rules of grammar have been acquired. In brain injured, deaf, and otherwise handicapped children, the rate of language learning is slowed down and the process stretched out, but the same order obtains.

Lenneberg and Noam Chomsky reject the ideas that language can be regarded as "verbal behavior" and that learning language is like acquiring any behavioral skill through selective reinforcement. A speaker does not have a "verbal repertoire," but rather the acquisition of language provides for infinite expansions of the rules out of which innumerable novel sound sequences can occur. These contrasting approaches both have their pedagogical implications. Lenneberg maintains, for instance, that programming techniques cannot be expected to hasten the biologically limited rate of development. He feels that a poor language environment does not handicap a child permanently and that if the social environment is enriched at an early enough chronological age, the appropriate age can be speedily achieved.[6] Inasmuch as language profoundly shapes the child's perception of his environment and influences his self-regulatory activities, the issue is an important one.

Does the primacy of speech over writing still prevail?

Partly as a result of that part of linguistic science called contrastive analysis and partly because of common sense through experience, language teaching has taken the path of language learning, that is, teachers have generally recognized the order in which languages are acquired and have applied this order to their methodology. This order respects primacy of speech without losing sight of the final goals of total acculturation which follow the first phrases. The well-known steps are these:

(a) Listening and understanding
(b) Speaking and knowing
(c) Reading and questioning
(d) Writing and thinking creatively

When errors and problems or oral communication are given sufficient correction and consideration in (a) and (b), those which will occur in (c) and (d) will be greatly reduced.. Specific and partially predictable trouble spots will arise in all of the steps calling for specific preventive and remedial work.

The "fundamental skills" approach holds as its primordial concern the teaching of all five fundamental communication skills in the proper order: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and cultural behavior. Since the technique is dialogue-based and deals with whole phrases rather than isolated words in all steps, the cultural element is all pervasive and is, therefore, involved in every step. Much has been written and debated regarding the relative merits of this approach as opposed to other methods, but the fundamental skills procedures are most prevalent in all the best teaching materials that represent the high water marks of the state of the art of language teaching today.

A contrastive analysis of the sound patterns of the target and native languages can give teachers many clues concerning what to look for at the various levels.[7] Children of foreign parents will listen, understand, and know but will perceive differently and hence pronounce differently. It is the teacher's task to know why these interferences occur and how to substitute them with other acceptable forms without leaving the learner with a sense of shame. It is not difficult, in fact, by methods mentioned above to instill a deep sense of pride in persons, who are bilingual and thus bicultural, even though one of their languages may be less than perfect.

Audio and Visual Interferences in Second Language Learning

What causes some of the vexing auxiliary problems? There are, of course, many interferences both audio and visual in second language learning. Some of them, which arise mainly in the early difficult steps of listening and speaking, have symptoms which resemble related medical and psychological problems such as aura agnosia, dyslexia, stuttering, loss of memory, deafness, or even mental retardation. One of the curious ones, for instance, is linguistic metathesis, which simply means the transposition of sounds. An example similar in effect but not exactly metathesis would be the story of the lady who asks the butcher for two pounds of "kidleys," whereupon he remarks, "You mean kidneys,. don't you?" And she retorts, "I said kidleys, didle I?" The strange thing about metathesis is that very often the speaker actually hears the inversion, in which case there is a reception problem. Others hear the form correctly, but produce metathesized imitations because of a little understood "production block." Here are some real examples of metathesis that happened inadvertently to articulate, professional, radio announcers in their own language. One can well imagine why it happens so often in second language learning.

1. Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States, Hoobert Heever.
2. Our company is the largest producer of magnusium, aleminum. and stool.
3. And now Stephen Foster's immortal song, "Ol' Jack Blow."
4. Don't forget to visit your A and Poo Feed Store.
5. His battalion was swallowed up in the Bulgen Belch.
6. Mr. Privilege, this is indeed a pigeon.
7. And now we present our homely friend-maker.
8. Be sure to listen to next week's sermon: "Cast thy broad upon the waters."

Sometimes there is transposition of entire morphemes with unaltered structure.

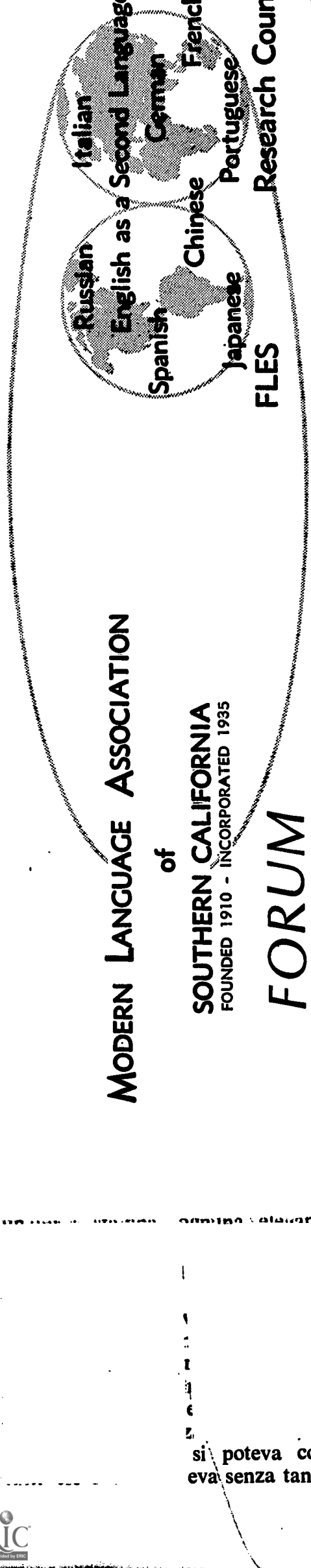
9. Flash! We interrupt this news bulletin to bring you a program. One of the main causes not yet mentioned of this amusing phenomenon of me athesis is *anticipation* in hurried running speech and the premature release of those anticipated elements.

Culture and Language as Defined by Nelson Brooks

In the event that some of you may still be wondering how on earth my feeble attempts at humor here today relate to the topic, I would like to do as so many others seems to do nowadays and that is coin some words of my own in saying that humor is a *culto-linguistic* phenomenon. It is totally dependent upon both cultural and linguistic inputs either by co-munication or simply by one way *munication*, such as the agony I am presently foisting upon you. But to lessen your boredom, let me point out that in his excellent article, "Teachers and Education," Nelson Brooks spoke of culture and language in this way:

"As we scrutinize language carefully to see exactly what it means, we are led directly to the culture in which the language is spoken natively, for only through

(Continued on Page 10)



si poteva comprare
eva senza tanto lusso

FORUM of the MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, INC.

Vol. VI, No. 2 — December, 1967

PUBLISHING COMMITTEE: E. Jules Mandel, Rosa E. Delanoeye and Sylvain Bernstein.

The FORUM is sent to members of MLASC. Membership is $5 per year, payable to Albert Jekenta, 942 Muirfield Rd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90019.

Officers of the Modern Language Association for Academic Year 1967-68:

President — Betty Benson
Vice President — Everett Hesse
Secretary — Robert Hirsh
Treasurer — Durward Poynter

BARRUTIA

(Continued from Page 9)

our efforts to understand culture can we arrive at a knowledge of what a language means to those whose language it is. This necessitates an excursion into the field of cultural anthropology. Every element of language corresponds to a segment of the totality of the thought and action and surroundings of those who speak it. It is this point-by-point relationship that gives it currency and value in the culture to which it belongs.[7]

There are important distinctions to make as we trace the elements of language to the segments of culture to which they refer. We must first of all distinguish between culture and civilization, the latter being essentially connected with living in cities, while the former refers to the totality of thought and life. We must also distinguish between verbal and nonverbal culture, between the food we are offered and what we say as we accept it. And we must make a still further distinction for which I propose the terms *formal* culture and *deep* culture, meaning by *formal* culture the results of creative endeavor, the achievement of intellectual and artistic genius, and all the various modes of significant thought and genteel living of which a country is fully aware and justly proud, and is quite ready to talk about, to display, and even to export. By *deep* culture, in contrast, we refer to individual thoughts and actions, the beliefs and concerns and hopes and worries, the personal preferences and the personal possessions, the many and subtle gradations of interpersonal relationships as expressed in deeds and words, the day-by-day details of life as it is lived—often with little or no awareness—at home and at school, in church and in celebrations, in childhood and in manhood, in country and in city—in a word, what it is like to be a Japanese or a German or a Peruvian. The word culture has many different meanings, and we must learn to agree on which meaning is meant. But not to learn culture, both *formal* and *deep* is not to learn meaning, and in language learning we would be left with the sounds and forms and syntax that referred to our culture, or to the wrong thing, or to nothing at all.[8]

The Language Teachers' Task

It is our task, then, as language teachers to take on the most formidable, important, and exciting job in the world. By whatever media that give the best results, it falls to us first to learn and understand all we can about communication, and then to teach to keep the cultural channels of the world open to further communication. It is our job to teach respect for the profundity and near sacredness of the cultures of all the countries of the world as manifest in their languages. Our charge also has some grave international implications. We know that because of the fastness of the bond which we have discussed here today between culture and language, the North and the South Vietnamese, for instance, will always identify more closely with one another than they will with Americans. So it becomes our job to teach Chinese or Vietnamese or Russian or Thai or whatever language we can teach to help in what we hope will not be in a vain attempt, to pull the cultural forces of the world together before they pull the world apart. But we can take heart that it is not all grim. For in the day-to-day doing of our task, the cultural fall out is warmth, satisfaction, joy, humor, understanding, and with just a little bit of luck perhaps even peace.

1. Nelson Brooks, "The Ideal Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers," **Foreign Languages and the Schools: A Book of Readings,** ed. Mildred R. Donoghue (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1967), p. 403.

2. Harry Hoijer, "Cultural Implications of Some Navaho Linguistic Categories," **Language,** 27 (1951), pp. 111-20.

Benjamin Lee Whorf, **Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings** (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956).

3. R. Brown and J. Berko, "Word Association and the Acquisition of Grammar," **Child Development,** 31 (1960), pp. 1-14.

4. Noam Chomsky, **Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought** (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 33.

5. Alfred S. Hayes, "New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching," **The Modern Language Journal,** XLIX, No. 5 (May 1965).

6. Eric H. Lenneberg, **The Biological Foundations of Language** (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967).

7. Robert P. Stockwell and J. Donald Bowen **The Sounds of English and Spanish** (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

8. Brooks, **op. cit.,** pp. 405-406.