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Reflection of Chapter 6

Reading Chapter 6 has given me an understanding of how language can uncover and shape a culture. The chapter explicitly explains how we should interpret, write and research language. Although people express themselves through words, we filter specific aspects of ourselves. A way to overcome this is to pay close attention to the nonverbal language that is being displayed. Our body language can communicate our true feelings unconsciously. Kinesics, the study of body communication, can help fieldworkers interpret a person’s facial expression, eye contact, posture, and gesture, to reveal a better understanding of the individual. To add on to nonverbal language, researchers have studied proxemics, the nonverbal communication of a group. For example, in a sports team, members can strategize together in a game by constant nonverbal cues. Another way we can better understand a subculture is through the way the group dresses. We can read and form an interpretation to who one might be by their style of dressing.

Another way language can give an insight into a subculture, is carefully listening to your informant’s speech. It can uncover their culture without them having to state it. For instance, a particular word, slang, or phrase can unlock their background. An example is when people can detect what region a person is from in the United States by the way they refer to a soft drink. If a person uses the word pop, it can be surmised that they live in the Midwest or western part of the United States. An East Coast resident in the U.S will use the word soda. Also, insiders of a particular subculture have their own special words that can reveal cultural value. Being aware of these terms that a group frequently use can help a researcher become an insider. In the research example given in the chapter about a fieldworker name Dina Dwyer, she gains intel about gun owners. By undergoing activities that gun owners do, Dina was able to incorporate the linguistic words into her research.

In the reading “A Language Journey” by Ofelia Zepeda, the writer uses an ethnopoetic notation to organize and receive her information on the concept that a language can never be truly translated to an outsider. The uses of enthnopoetic notation allows researcher to have a closer look into the perspective of the language. The author compares this idea to giving a person a drink of water with only your two hands cupped together. Water will still leak no matter how much pressure and firmness you put your hands together. You will never satisfy the thirsty of that individual and the same goes will an outsider that doesn’t speak the language, you can never make them fully comprehend your culture. I was able to relate to Ofelia in being one of the first people in her family to step out of her primary culture and learn a different language and culture. Just like Ofelia, it has influences and developed me into a different mindset and personality than of my Hispanic descent, knowing two languages I know the power language has on a culture.