

DISCOVERING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES VIA LANGUAGE

Nowadays, especially in Europe, where people from various backgrounds study and work side by side, language plays a far more important role than just helping us communicate. It gives us access to how others think, what they care about, and how they see the world. We have realized that learning a new language is not just about mastering grammar or memorizing words. It is more about stepping into someone else's worldview. This paper explores how language reflects and shapes cultural identity and why language learning is crucial in the context of intercultural education in Europe.

Language and culture are deeply connected. Over time, they shape each other. While learning German, for example, we came across the word *Heimat* – and we still have not found an exact English equivalent. It expresses a deep emotional connection to one's home and roots, and honestly, it made us reflect on how differently people relate to the idea of «home» [1, p. 64].

Language is a bridge in European universities where exchange programs and international teamwork are common. Claire Kramsch even calls language learners «cultural mediators» [3, p. 1] – and we can relate. Sometimes, explaining one culture's habit to someone from another makes a huge difference in understanding.

Language also reveals how people interact socially. In French or Ukrainian, for instance, there are formal and informal «you» forms depending on how close or respectful the relationship is. In English, it is just «you» for everyone – and that made us think about the more egalitarian feel of English-speaking cultures [3, p. 88].

One of the most fascinating things we have learned is how language can affect our thinking. In *Guugu Yimithirr*, an Indigenous Australian language,

people use cardinal directions instead of «left» or «right». So instead of saying «my left hand» they would say «my northeast hand» [2, p. 63]. The hypothetical of continuous north awareness proved intellectually transformative, fostering a revised perspective on the capacity of language to shape cognitive patterns.

It is posited that language learning possesses a transformative capacity, extending beyond instrumental value to foster essential competencies in receptive communication, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to transcend egocentric perspectives. In the context of Europe's diverse educational environments, this transformative aspect assumes heightened importance. Proficiency in another language entails linguistic competence and the ability to understand, establish rapport, and connect with others, thereby serving as the genesis of authentic intercultural exploration.

REFERENCES

1. Boroditsky, L. *How does our language shape the way we think?* 2009. URL: https://www.edge.org/conversation/lera_boroditsky-how-does-our-language-shape-the-way-we-think
2. Boroditsky, L. *How language shapes thought.* 2011, Vol. 304, No. 2, pp. 62–65. DOI: doi:10.1038/scientificamerican022011-6OFESmyT5BtKggV00Wn95I
3. Kramsch, C. *Language and Culture.*, – Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998, pp. 244-255. DOI:[10.1075/aila.27.02kra](https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.27.02kra).