

THE FEATURES OF PERCEPTION OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL UNITS BY 6TH GRADE STUDENTS

Kurbonova Gulibonu Tulkinovna

Urgench State Pedagogical Institute, PhD Candidate

(Independent Researcher)

Abstract

This study focuses on the perception of linguistic and cultural units by 6th-grade students, exploring how young learners understand and interpret language structures and cultural elements in the process of acquiring a second language. The research investigates the challenges and cognitive mechanisms involved in grasping linguistic nuances and cultural concepts. It emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural knowledge into language learning and how it impacts the comprehension of both language forms and cultural contexts. The study also examines the role of teachers in facilitating the understanding of these units and suggests pedagogical approaches to enhance students' cross-cultural competence. By addressing these issues, the research aims to offer insights into improving teaching methods and creating more effective language learning environments for young learners.

Keywords: linguistic units, cultural units, perception, 6th-grade students, second language acquisition, cross-cultural competence, pedagogy, language learning.

Introduction

The acquisition of a second language involves not only mastering linguistic forms but also understanding the cultural nuances embedded within the language. For young learners, such as 6th-grade students, the process of comprehending linguistic and cultural units presents unique challenges. These challenges arise from the cognitive and psychological stages of development, as well as the students' limited exposure to the second language outside of the classroom environment.

Understanding linguistic units such as vocabulary, grammar, idioms, and cultural units like customs, traditions, and social norms, is essential for young learners to fully grasp the language. Moreover, an effective language acquisition process is

often shaped by how well students can relate language concepts to their own experiences and cultural backgrounds. Thus, a significant part of language teaching involves helping students make connections between the linguistic forms they are learning and the cultural contexts in which these forms are used.

This research aims to explore how 6th-grade students perceive linguistic and cultural units in the process of second language acquisition. The study will examine the ways in which students comprehend these units, the challenges they face, and the role that teachers play in facilitating cultural understanding. Furthermore, the study will offer recommendations for improving language instruction by incorporating cultural knowledge and understanding into the curriculum.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted with a sample of 6th-grade students from several middle schools in the region. A total of 100 students participated in the study, with an equal number of male and female students. The research employed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques.

Survey and Questionnaires:

A survey was administered to students to gather data on their perceptions of linguistic and cultural units. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions about their understanding of key vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, cultural practices, and traditions of the target language. The survey also sought to assess students' self-reported confidence in understanding the cultural aspects of the language they were learning.

Observation:

Classroom observations were conducted during language lessons to identify how teachers incorporate cultural elements into their teaching and how students respond to these elements. The focus was on the strategies employed by teachers to integrate cultural context into linguistic lessons, such as the use of cultural examples, multimedia, and real-life situations.

Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with language teachers to explore their perspectives on the challenges students face when learning linguistic and cultural units. Teachers were

asked about their instructional methods and how they address cultural concepts in their lessons. The interviews also focused on the effectiveness of current teaching strategies in enhancing students' cultural and linguistic competence.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data collected from surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the general trends in students' perceptions of linguistic and cultural units. Qualitative data from open-ended questions, classroom observations, and teacher interviews were analyzed through thematic coding to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and strategies related to the teaching of linguistic and cultural units. The combined use of surveys, observations, and interviews allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the perception of linguistic and cultural units by 6th-grade students and provided valuable insights into effective pedagogical approaches for teaching language and culture simultaneously.

Results and Discussion

The data collected from surveys, classroom observations, and teacher interviews provided valuable insights into the features of perception of linguistic and cultural units by 6th-grade students.

Perception of Linguistic Units:

The majority of students (70%) demonstrated a basic understanding of core linguistic units such as vocabulary and simple sentence structures in the target language. However, the comprehension of more complex linguistic elements, such as idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and phrasal verbs, posed significant challenges. Approximately 60% of students indicated difficulty in understanding idiomatic phrases or expressions that do not have a direct translation in their native language.

Perception of Cultural Units:

Students showed a moderate level of understanding of cultural units related to customs, traditions, and social norms. However, only 50% of students could successfully identify and explain cultural practices from the target language culture. The students' ability to connect cultural knowledge with linguistic structures was limited, indicating a need for more integrated teaching strategies.

Teacher Strategies:

Teachers generally used a variety of strategies to integrate cultural aspects into the language lessons, including storytelling, multimedia presentations, and the use of real-life examples. Despite these efforts, teachers noted that students often struggled to see the relevance of cultural knowledge in their language learning, with only 40% of teachers reporting that their students consistently applied cultural knowledge in their language use.

Challenges Faced by Students:

Students identified several challenges related to the perception of linguistic and cultural units. These included:

Lack of exposure to the target language outside the classroom, which limited their ability to understand cultural contexts.

Difficulty in relating cultural practices to their own experiences.

Limited vocabulary knowledge, especially related to culture-specific terms.

Discussion

The findings reveal that while 6th-grade students demonstrate a general understanding of linguistic and cultural units, they face several barriers in fully perceiving and applying these units. One of the primary challenges is the difficulty in comprehending idiomatic and metaphorical expressions that are deeply rooted in the culture of the target language. This is consistent with previous studies that suggest young learners struggle with non-literal meanings and context-dependent expressions.

Additionally, the perception of cultural units is significantly influenced by the level of exposure students have to the target culture. Cultural competence is essential for language learners, but it requires more than just exposure to cultural artifacts; it involves understanding the values, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the language itself. The study found that students' limited exposure to real-life cultural experiences, such as interactions with native speakers or participation in cultural events, hindered their ability to understand and internalize cultural practices.

Teachers' attempts to integrate cultural knowledge into their lessons were commendable, but the challenge remains in effectively connecting cultural understanding with linguistic competence. The study aligns with findings by Byram (2000) that emphasize the need for a more integrated approach to teaching language

and culture, where students learn not just the language but also the cultural contexts in which the language is used.

Moreover, students' limited ability to apply cultural knowledge in their language use suggests that there is a gap between theoretical knowledge of culture and practical application in communication. This highlights the importance of creating opportunities for students to actively engage with both linguistic and cultural units in meaningful ways.

Conclusion

The study underscores the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural units in the language learning process for 6th-grade students. While students generally understand basic linguistic forms, their perception of complex linguistic and cultural elements remains limited. The findings suggest that enhancing students' exposure to the target culture and using more interactive, context-rich teaching methods can significantly improve their ability to perceive and apply linguistic and cultural units. Teachers play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between language and culture by providing opportunities for students to engage with authentic cultural materials and participate in real-life language use. To improve language instruction, it is essential for educators to focus not only on teaching language structures but also on fostering an understanding of cultural contexts and their influence on language use.

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