

Encouraging the Creation and Adoption of Reading Culture: Panacea to Effective Language Learning

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Abstract

Central to every learning environment, and by extension every community, is how enlightened its members are. Reading is one of the processes by which every member or community members get enlightened. A society that places premium on reading is a society that achieves greatness. Reading is embedded in a complex cultural network system of a society because it is a highly complex cultural system that involves a great many considerations beyond the decoding by the reader of the words of a text. It allows individual readers construct their understanding, through sociocultural influences that inform the meaning the reader seeks to construct. Through reading, individual readers construct an informal social network that could be described as proto-community. This paper seeks to come up with ways societies can encourage the development, over time, of a reading culture that would have deep roots in the traditions of a given society especially in Saudi Arabia where reading is not seen as part of life or has been completely thrown away. It suggests ways teachers can encourage the utilization of space and time, the two integral components of culture, in reading among learners to build in them a solitary act-an act that is constituted through interaction between the ideas of the writer and the brain of the reader. With this, learning takes place and language is developed.

Keywords: Culture, Language, Reading Culture

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Introduction

One of the natural instincts which people are known with is living in an ecological environment as social beings. The coming together of people develops a social network that allows individual and group identities to be rooted, and with such identities giving rise to cultural affiliation among the people. Scholars have defined culture from different perspectives; however, a defining characteristic of culture is that people who come together adopt ideas, customs, social behaviors and or other manifestations of human intellectual achievements which are regarded as collectively gained by a society and that is defined by everything from the language that propels the people's interactions, to their religion, the food they eat, the music they play and listen to, the arts and crafts they display, etc.

These activities carried out by the people become shared patterns of the society's behavior and interactions, and cognitive constructs and understanding among them. So, a unified mental understanding and interaction is developed between and among the people who identify themselves as members of such society. These understanding and interactions are acquired and learned through the process of socialization. The end result here will be the growth of a group identity that is fostered by social patterns which are unique to the group.

Culture and Language

For the purpose of this writing, culture can be divided into two distinct types. The first one is a culture within a macro level of human achievements. This is mostly rooted in cognitive or mental faculty of the individual members of the identified group. At this level, the group members' religious affiliation, the group's moral values and mores, the history of the group, their social structure, and the language(s) spoken by the members are clear indications of the group's collective sense of togetherness and cultural affiliation.

The second one is micro culture which is primarily seen in tangible and, to some extent, intangible materials displayed or used in the given society. Such materials include food, clothes, sleeping habits, marriages and divorces, fish, rice, cars, schools, hospitals, etc. Daily display of these micro items and their eventual acceptance by all members create an identity through which members are known. In summing up the meaning of culture, a presenter opines that culture "...includes the knowledge that people need to have to function effectively in their social environment." That this knowledge "...is learned and shared behavior that is transmitted from one generation to another for the purpose of promoting individual and social (group) survival and adaptation." Faiq (2006, p.8)

The survival of members of any social group and the group as a whole is largely dependent on the level of communication that regulates the activities of the group members. Interaction between and among members may create a communication circle. The place of communication circle is sum up as, "(t)he circle is the fundamental geometry of open human communication." (Harrison Owen 2013). (Appendix A explains more on Communication circle). Members may consciously or subconsciously be asking questions that when answered, the efficiency of the communication is gained and culture is circulated. The questions are:

- Why are we here and why are we together?
- What are we committed to?
- What do we as individual members do for the survival of the group?
- Where do we meet?
- When do we start? And,
- What do we do next?

The level of communication involved is largely carried out through the use of language, an integral component of any culture. What is this thing called language? And where is it found? Any sound pattern spoken or written, and or gesture and body movement which is arbitrarily agreed upon as a means of communication by members of a speech community can be termed as a language. It is found in a social group and it is used to transmit learned and shared behavior which a particular social group promotes for their survival and adaptation.

Invariably, there is a fusing of culture and language. Culture is developed, promoted, and transmitted from one generation to another through language and in turn language is deeply rooted in a given culture. It therefore, implies that culture adopts a language, and a language transmits a culture. Language is a vehicle with which culture is understood and moved from one individual to another; so, a comprehension of a language is an understanding of a culture. When a language is spoken, written and understood, culture is represented and transmitted. As the language gets widely used, the culture it is rooted in becomes trans-cultured. That is, the culture moves with the language. So, the further away from the cultural environment a language moves into other environments, the further the culture moves with it. (Appendix B shows the overlapping nature of culture and language).

Reading

Culture has its transmitting agents, and one of the agents is education. A thorough understanding of culture and getting individuals completely immersed in it is done through education. Individual members of a social group become fully involved when they get educated on their responsibilities and duties as members of the group. Such education, level of awareness and commitment are mostly conducted through informal education. Daily relationships and interactions of individual members of this social group, through greetings, religious congregations, festivals, ceremonies, family relationships, community services, intra-town commuting etc., are all means by which informal education is used to keep and transmit culture.

Furthermore, a formal system of education is also used to transmit culture from generation to generation; through this, the social group becomes both literate and numerate. A literate social group is one whose ability to read and write is high, and its members' competence in mathematical skills needed to cope with everyday life, is equally high. Computer literacy is also considered; and members of the group are involved in learning how to access information and perform basic operations on a computer. Information literacy is essential for the group's survival. Gotau (2015, p.6) defines information literacy as, "...the ability to recognize when information is needed and how to locate, evaluate and effectively use and communicate in various formats." This is aimed at using techniques and skills acquired for utilization of the wide range of information materials and tools available in solving problems.

It is believed that the orthodox method for acquiring formal literacy and numeracy level is through reading. In his work on readers and reading, William A. Johnson (2010) observes that reading is “the individual’s construction of meaning” which is not “wholly interior; rather, sociocultural influences always inform the meaning that the reader seeks to construct...” Reading is done by individuals, but it is a social other than being solely individual engagement only. It is an act that develops overtime, and whose roots are deeply in the traditions of an identified social group. It is a complex network of cultural system that involves individual’s interpretation beyond the printed words seen and read. When a person reads, understanding and meaning are gained as a result of the influence of the social environment, individual’s disposition to his cultural affiliation and the social group’s interpretation of meanings.

Reading Culture

Perhaps, it will be appropriate now to try to interlock reading with culture. It has been established earlier that reading is not only an individual’s sole engagement in a solitary act, but social and environmental influences determine what is interpreted and understood from the reading. When individuals engage in the act of reading, their sociocultural group’s understanding of the world around them interferes with what eventually becomes clear understanding of what the readers have read. This undeniable influence of social group interpretation of knowledge and understanding in reading shows how culture directly gets involved in reading. It therefore implies that a social group or community can adopt a, somewhat, new macro cum micro cultural activity called reading culture. Magara and Batambuze (2005, quoted by Ruterana, 2012, p.18) in their work on reading culture sum up its meaning to stand “...as a culture where reading is part of the people’s living and constitutes a habit that is shared by members of the society.” As broad as this definition seemed, it goes to say that a reading culture allows reading to be integrated pattern of behavior, practice, belief, perception and knowledge which community members (social group) refer and respond to in their everyday life.

A further extension of the meaning of reading culture will be that an act that permits a learned practice of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through the written words or printed materials is incorporated into the life style of a people who by act of omission or commission see themselves as united under one common goal-reading. This knowledge can be acquired by reading books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and any other printed materials arbitrarily approved by the social group they belong to. Also the success of such reading culture is solely dependent on the social group’s ability to teach its members how to read and how to get them integrated into a specific social relationship; a kind of subconscious social contract is entered into.

Why Reading Culture?

Each time a society develops, adopts or encourages the creation of reading culture amongst its members, some social factors that condition what passes for knowledge in that given society or social group, the relationships between the social structure and the social group’s thoughts, and the maintenance of social reality and social knowledge system are brought into fore. So when reading culture becomes part of a social group’s macro or micro activity:

- individual members of that social environment construct their everyday cultural world, which in turn transforms their experiences of those particular social space and time into meaningful social behavior,
- helps its members increase their understanding of the functions and features of the language in use, and their place and role in the society or community,
- members develop an essential sense of problem-solving by applying reasoning abilities to understand the linguistic relationships between speech and writing. This develops in the group members a sense of cognitive clarity; and
- develops in its members intercultural communicative competence-ability to understand the language and behavior of a given culture as used in the materials being read, and vice versa. This simply means members are able to view different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding.

Implication for Teachers and on Language Learning

As teachers of language, what are some of the implications of creating and adopting reading culture on a social group and on language learning in general? Philip Riley (2007) points out that knowledge cannot be divorced from the knowers or seekers of such knowledge, and there is a strong relationship between a group and its communicative practices. Therefore, every act of knowledge is only possible through the medium of the language a social group uses. The interdependence means that the modes of thought of this social group and the culture adopted by them can only be understood in and through their language, because each language describes the world in its own terms, thereby, forming a unique mode of thought and expression for its group members. As teachers, we should note that:

- 1) Culture is embedded in real-life situations, and in temporally and spatially specific ways. That is to say culture is part of a social group's or society's everyday life; and time and space are central to the development and adoption of any culture. Culture is played out in an environment that is located within a territorial or geographical space and within a cyclical or rational period in time.
- 2) Culture allows for the growth of a group identity.
- 3) Culture builds in people the knowledge that they need to have to be able to function effectively in their social environment.
- 4) Language is one of the transmitting agents of culture
- 5) Language and culture are intricately interwoven, therefore, culture influences language acquisition and learning, just as much as language influences adoption of culture
- 6) Education is one of the propellers of culture, and a vehicle for building independent and or collective literate and numerate society
- 7) Through reading culture, individual members and the society in general develop a sense of problem-solving and ability to understand the links between written materials and speech
- 8) Reading culture breeds positive behaviors and interactions, and cognitive constructs and understanding that give rise to self-dependence, team work and development.

All this goes to say encouraging the creation, development or adoption of reading between and among our students could eventually lead to a culture-which when put in place, monitored and protected, social knowledge will evolve. Social knowledge is the aspect of human search for the relationship between knowledge and existence; it allows members of a social group to trace the forms of the relationship that has taken place in their intellectual development as mankind. Social group members form their perception of their society and the world at large, which they see as a set of functions and structures for the management of knowledge-knowledge which includes creation, organization, distribution, storage, legitimization, and utilization of both cognitive and abstract ideas and phenomena. This is what eventually passes from one generation to another generation as culture.

Factors that may militate against the Creation of Reading Culture

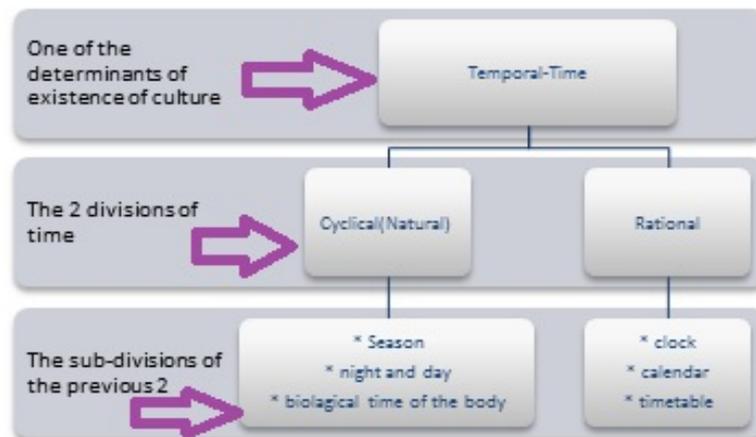
Having enumerated some of the implications of culture, reading and reading culture on teaching and language learning, next is to look into how as teachers or community members we can individually or collectively encourage the creation of reading culture. Before then however, there is need to understand that certain factors militate against individuals or group from engaging in reading. Until these factors are taken out of the way or eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum, chances are that reading would remain elusive. S. O. Unoh (1972) identifies fourteen (14) factors why individuals may have problems with reading. They are:

1. Slowness in word recognition
2. Word by word reading
3. Vocalization and sub-vocalization
4. Poor visual perception
5. Excessive eye fixation
6. Regression
7. Finger pointing and hand movement
8. Difficulty with the return sweep
9. Lack of motivation or interest
10. Inflexibility
11. Lack of basic linguistic skills
12. Lack of comprehension
13. A form of occupational hazard
14. Personality attributes and disorders.

It is the responsibility of both teachers and the community to make sure these impediments are eliminated completely or reduced to the barest minimum if reading is to be encouraged among the social group members we desire to develop. Some of them need both psychological approach to eliminating them and individual determination if they are to be overcome.

Encouraging the Creation and Adoption of Reading Culture

Two factors are central to the existence of culture-time and space, so, to encourage the creation of a reading culture, all effort should be expounded in, first, creating a spatio-temporal economy of everyday activities of the social group members. Time as one of the factors is divided into two as seen in this illustration:



In the illustration, time as a determinant of culture is divided into two-cyclical time, which is the natural time around the world divided into seasons mostly summer, autumn (fall), winter and spring. Then comes the normal time of the day classified as night and day with each one having 12 hours in a day. The cyclical time also has the biological time the human body or social group member's body undergoes certain changes. These changes affect human actions at a given point in time. (It is biologically explained in a diagram in Appendix C).

Time as a determinant of culture also covers what is called rational time. This is the normal time around the clock having 24 hours in a day; the calendar of the year which has 12 months in a year; and the scheduled time of carrying out certain events. Some of these events have fixed timetable or schedule, such as the school classroom schedule/timetable, time for breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper etc.

The second important determinant of culture is space. This is the topographical environment within which culture thrives. It is the spatial contours of social existence where human activities are daily conducted by members of a particular social group who resides in it, and whose daily activities are regulated by the territorial limitations arbitrarily agreed upon by the members of the social group or their ancestors.

Interlacing the importance of both space and time in the creation of a reading culture or adoption of existing one, it is good to note that individual members to be coopted into the social group live in a social environment, and therefore, such environment must be made conducive for reading and learning as well. The member's time must also be considered since certain biological time can affect certain actions carried out by people. Time is integral means of production, so people tend to be apprehensive of losing time because it is synchronized with labor and the organization of work and leisure. It is also seen in a three distinct

conceptions-as a commodity-in which case the social group members can only spare it from other activities; as a contingency-in which case the members of a social group use it when the opportunity presents itself; and finally, as an object which can be grabs sometimes within a day of the members busy schedules. In all these cases reading only fits in when individuals who are to be engaged in the act have time to spare, when the time presents itself (mostly unplanned), and when time can be grabs within or between other activities.

As time is considered for reading, it is important to also note that time for reading cannot exist without a place in which to read. The place in which reading occurs is a constitutive element in the order of creating or adopting a reading culture. This is because reading is a spatially constituted act: an act performed within both a particular reading community and an individual's home or space provided or available. It is noteworthy that by creating reading places, social group members who would eventually be called readers actually construct their everyday cultural worlds because reading transforms their experiences of particular social spaces. In the confines of the home, the domain of the school, and in the crush of public transport, reading marks the space as what Wise calls 'a place of comfort' (Wise 2000, p. 297 quoted by Collinson, 2009, p.64). The everyday value of reading in this instance is not to be found in the text, or in the aesthetic of the printed materials, but in the way reading allows social group members in a given location to transform it, albeit temporarily, into a 'place' partly of their own making.

Having established the two dominant factors that influence the creation or adoption of reading culture, focus will now be on how to encourage reading amongst people or social group members. Three areas are highlighted here, namely:

- The parents/ community
- School/college/university
- Pupils/students/individuals

The first thing those saddled with the responsibility of teaching need to be able to do to encourage the creation or adoption of a reading culture is what could be termed as paradigm shift. Two philosophical theories have contributed immensely to knowledge, education, and teaching and learning, they are: empiricism and pragmatism. Most learning environments tend to focus on pragmatic approach to teaching and learning because it emphasizes that curriculum should incorporate the necessary practical activities that prepare learners for adult life through group activities that are centred on hands that can explore. It also places emphasis on the belief that knowledge is unique to the individual, so it is up to them to identify what is important and relevant. As interesting and practical as this theory is, it must be noted that certain aspect of knowledge cannot be learnt in practical terms. Abstract ideas can only be understood and absorbed through lay down or established rules.

Reading materials are directly the product of the writers' ideas and understanding of the world around them. It then goes down to say, a thorough and real understanding of the materials can only be achieved by individual reader's direct experience with the printed materials rather than their presumptuous belief in interpreting life as it arises-the cardinal principle of pragmatism. Encouraging the creation or adoption of reading culture will require a slight shift away from this pragmatic approach to learning. A bit of a shift to idealism-a

branch of empiricism may be required if positive results are to be expected. There is need to possibly blend the two approaches also.

This paradigm shift is at a broader level, there is need to start from the miniature community level-the family. Parents should be encouraged to adopt reading as a pastime. Local newspaper articles can focus on reading, events, celebrations, milestones achieved, library developments, etc. This way, parents get themselves involved in reading since the printed materials around them are focused on their achievements as individuals or a collective whole. Other ways to encourage reading and eventually create a reading culture could be:

- Creating a possible link between the schools and public libraries through organizing classroom or college visits to the libraries, and vice versa.
- Organizing book events such as the annual reading competitions, community Post Book Awards, Library Week, etc. This should be with active participation of both parents and their wards.
- Display in corridors, office entrances, cafes, cafeteria, sports arenas, recreation centres, etc., of interesting reading articles, gist and community gossips.
- Placing notices of reading events such as challenges or giving incentives to readers in schools, inviting or visiting local and national authors, etc.
- Placing photos of students, staff, and other role models who have been identified as avid readers.
- Education high management officials making recommendation of “Book of the Week” and with a prize for students who read and send in best summary of the book.
- Promoting public library by:-
 - a. Displaying signs pointing to the library and footprints heading in the direction of the library, and how many steps to the library.
 - b. Displaying opening hours of the library and assigning students to serve in the library.
 - c. Organizing library quiz of the week; participants can be directed to find the answers to the quiz in the library to make them eligible to participate in the competition.
 - d. Students are directed to work on a book that can be found in a library by doing a review of the book, summarizing the book etc.
 - e. Information about new books coming to the library, and events coming up in the library.
 - f. Quotes about reading, favourite opening lines of books, favourite characters-students are encouraged to go to the library to find the quotes or the books.

Teachers in the Classroom

As teachers we can play significant role in the classroom in helping our students or learners adopt reading as part of their daily lives. So, while in the classroom we can set an example to our students by:

- i. Reading aloud to our students every day.
- ii. Making time for our students to read.
- iii. Having plenty of great books on display in the classroom.
- iv. Sharing our own reading experiences with our students.
- v. Organizing a reading competition in our classrooms.
- vi. Inviting high management staff to read to our students in the classroom

Students in the Classroom

As teachers we can also help our students become active participants in the classroom in terms of reading if we create an enabling environment that allows the students to be able to:

- Hear stories, share their recommendations, discuss books that are found the library as a classroom and independently.
- Talk about what they have read last, what they are reading now, what they are going to read next, etc.
- Have friend readers, where some will be reading mentors or reading champions in the classroom or school.
- Have books with them during break times.

Again the library plays an integral role in encouraging reading culture, therefore, school librarians and management staff can help instill a reading culture in a school by ensuring:

- The library is well-resourced, well-staffed and well-used to serve as a vital catalyst for the reading culture to thrive.
- Teachers collaborate with the librarian to use the library as an essential resource for their literacy programs and initiatives.
- The library should be included in visitor's tours of the school.
- The library should be used for events.
- The library should be included in the teachers and students lunchtime duty rosters.

Student Leaders

Student leaders are important role models and can help in promoting reading by:

- I. Promoting books in classrooms.
- II. Displaying photos in the library of themselves reading during vacations.
- III. Being given status and recognition for their active participation in reading.

Creating an Online Presence

The place of the internet, online programmes, and applications (apps) cannot be undervalued in the world of today. If a genuine reading culture is to be encouraged and adopted, focus must be placed on them. There are numerous ways schools, individuals and even organizations can promote a reading culture online. This may include:

- Displaying information on the school's website, intranet, blog, library home page about reading, readers, research, resources and links.
- Getting students to participate online in appropriate fora such as "Book of the Week" site; conservative story or graphic novel illustration competition sites; student writing sites, and book review sites etc.
- Developing a reading application (app) that encourages students to read interesting stories and send feedbacks.

It should be noted that the above suggestions are not exhaustive, there are other ways all stakeholders could help in encouraging the creation and adoption of reading culture in a given socio-cultural group for the benefit of their community and their country at large. These benefits are numerous and cannot be extensively discussed here. However, as earlier mentioned the creation of a reading culture is a direct invitation of the understanding, acquisition and learning of language since language and culture are inexplicably interwoven. Thomas Berger (1970) is with the belief that social knowledge is central to the development of any group existence because it provides the framework for fuller and more socially adequate account of the identity of the people who come together as members of a social group. Members share knowledge, culture and language that permit them to establish reciprocity of perspectives or definition of the situation around them. Berger went further to express the central role of language in this process of individual and group identity. To him: Language is both the foundation and the instrumentality of the social construction

of reality. Language focalizes, patterns and objectivates human experience. Language is the principal means by which an individual is socialized to become an inhabitant of the world shared with others and also provides the means by which, in conversation with others, the common world becomes plausible to him. On this linguistic base is erected the edifice of interpretive schemes, cognitive and moral norms, values system and, finally, theoretically-articulated 'world views' which, in their totality, form the world of 'collective representations' ...of any given society. (Berger 1970, p.376 quoted by Riley 2007, pp.18-19)

The individual or group's identity is the ability of the people to form dyads and to enter into intersubjective couplings so that they become products of social interaction between and among themselves. Through this union which becomes a reflection of their interactive experiences, and facilitated and canalized by a common language, it enables members to become who they are as individuals and as group by extrapolating from the inter- to the intrapersonal beings. Therefore, this structure of the society, the language adopted and the interaction engaged in are the sources of individual identity which in turn provides communicative strategies acquired by discursive and cognitive basis of the individual member's personal speech.

Thus, when members of a social group adopt reading as a pastime, such members become consciously involved in the creation of a community and a culture that socially bound them together and the social definition of their identity takes place within an overarching definition of reality around them, which by extension becomes their definition of their own world.

Conclusion

The everyday reader which a reading culture seeks to create is not necessarily confined to a professional or academic reader only; it is a society where every individual, through reading, seeks to broaden their horizon and scope of their understanding of the world around them and even beyond them. So, a society that puts cultural economies of time and space of its members into account is eventually created-and within such a spatio-temporal economy readers will create a place and time for reading which will involve professionals, students, parents and any other person who wishes to be part of such society. This way a culture that is embedded in real-life situation, with its human intellectual achievements, cognitive construction, socializing processes, and members' interactions with a central connecting communicative tool called language will evolve. Through this, and over time, and from one generation to another generation a culture that enlightens, builds and institutionalized human phenomenon called language is acquired and in some cases learnt.

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<https://www.google.com.sa/search?q=biological+time+of+the+body&tbn>

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Appendix A: Communication Circle



Source:

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Standing in the middle is the gigantic culture globe created by members of the social group. When members talk to each other, exchange ideas, etc, a wave of cultural identity is exerted and sent across to every member of the social group who is part of the cyclical formation around the culture globe. They form a circle that becomes interdependent and in turn regulates the existence and survival of each member.

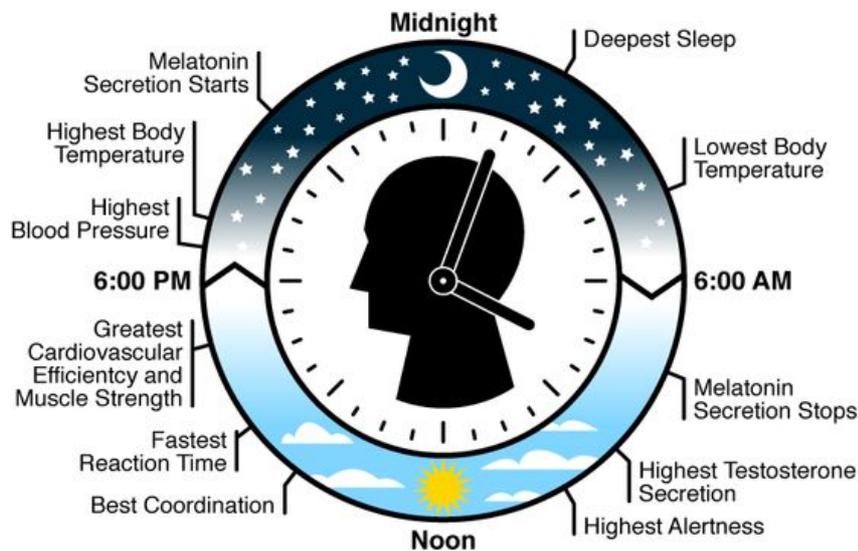
Appendix B: Culture and Language



Source: (Faiq 2006, p.13)

The diagram above shows culture overlapping into the realms of language, just as language overlaps into culture and they are mutually inclusive of each other. The end result builds up “CULGUAGE” culture in and for language and language in and for culture.

Appendix C: Human Biological Time



Source:

<https://www.google.com.sa/search?q=biological+time+of+the+body&tbn>

Human body undergoes certain biological changes at certain time in the day. The diagram, read clockwise, shows that between 12 midnight to about 6:00am human body requires some degree of rest and allows for deep sleep, while the body temperature drops to the lowest level. Between 6:00am to 12 noon the human body is mentally at the highest alert level-it accommodates more and gets fully aware of the environment around it. It's the period where some biochemical secretions either stopped or are released at the highest level. And between 12 noon to 6:00pm, the human body responds to the greatest cardiovascular activities. Here the body is actively able to exert a lot of energy and allows the muscles to support strong physical activities. And between 6:00pm to 12 midnight the body undergoes changes involving body temperature and blood pressure, too. Both come at their highest level; and certain secretion starts at this point, also.