

A Critical Analysis of Cultural Heterogeneity in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*

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Abstract: Culture is a learned set of an individual's behavioural and habitual imprint which is acquired and shaped from familial interactions, neighbourhood, and schools as well as from social and national rituals and displayed in meeting, sitting, eating, chatting and other forms of communications. This paper examines the heterogeneous cultural co-existence in Eva Hoffman's novel *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. This paper applies qualitative data analysis method of primary, secondary and tertiary data to find answers of the research questions, viz. a) what are the challenges in the juxtaposition of heterogeneous cultural co-existence in same geographical location co-existed by intentional as well as forced migration from native culture to foreign culture? b) What are the benefits of diversified cultural co-existence? This study finds cultural co-existence challenging and beneficial as it makes someone aware of own culture as well as diverse culture by the gradual process of cultural acceptance and denial and hence, paves the ways for building global or intercultural communicative competences.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural-coexistence, Diversified Culture, Eva Hoffman, Language and Culture

Introduction

This paper will culturally analyse Eva Hoffman's novel *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* from cross-cultural perspectives using primary, secondary and tertiary data. The novel *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* recounts Eva Hoffman's life from childhood through her mid-thirties. Eva was born and brought up in Poland. In 1949, Eva's family moves to Canada. At that time, Eva was thirteen year old. She leaves Poland with her father, mother and younger sister to Canada. When they reach Canada, a Polish-born Canadian citizen named Mr. Resenberg, who has been living in Canada for a quite long time, welcomes and receives them. Mr. Rosenberg achieves name and fame by doing business in Vancouver, Canada. On the one hand, Eva leaves behind her culture as well as Polish language and, on the other, she comes in contact of different linguistic and cultural domain. This paper will culturally and linguistically analyse the days of author's life in Vancouver, a sea-port city of British Columbia in Canada. In such a cultural juncture, Eva faces the trials

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and tribulations as an immigrant who is ill prepared to set foot in a world with new languages, customs and cultures. Mastering the language and customs proves to be a daunting task for Eva. So, a great deal of fear and rage also exist regarding immigrant status and the role in which a thirteen year old girl Eva is forced to play. Hence, Eva mentally fights against the system and eventually forges her own way. In her case, a sense of loss for the old linguistic and cultural heritage coupled with a feeling of acceptance paves the ways for future challenges and benefits regarding linguistic and cultural changes. The first part of this article will discuss the methodology used in writing this paper. This is followed by the definition of culture, sub-culture, and the global co-existences of diversified culture. The paper will then analyse different characters and situations of the novel from cross-cultural viewpoints incorporating existing cultural theories and perspectives. Finally, it will critically comment on cultural co-existence and its challenges and benefits shown in the novel.

Research Methodology

This study applies qualitative data analysis method. This study uses primary, secondary and tertiary data to complete the following research objectives:

1. Locating challenges of diversified cultural co-existence
2. Finding benefits of cross-cultural interaction

This paper uses Eva Hoffman's novel *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* as primary data and research articles and books as the secondary and tertiary data.

Definition of Culture and Sub-culture

Definition of culture is not determined yet in spite of empirical research at hand. In 1952, American anthropologists Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn published a book containing more than 200 pages devoted to different definitions of culture. Successively, other scholars add to the definitions and approaches of the term. Koester and Lustig (2010) define, "Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people" (25).

The authors argue that humans get "the genetic imprint of a particular culture" (ibid, 25) from birth. They also describe that culture is learned through interaction. Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov show same view by defining culture as mental programming that "starts within the family; it continues within the neighborhood, at school, in youth groups, at the workplace, and in the living community" (Hofstede et al. 5). However, Matthew Arnolds' *Culture and Anarchy* (2018) divides culture in two different dimensions namely high culture that refers to the attitudes and behaviors shown in the intellectual and aristocratic group in a society and another folkway that popular culture noticed in the commoners and less aristocratic class in a social group. Edward Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1877), defines culture in a specific way by mentioning culture as "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (cited in Spencer-Oatey 1) that contradicts Arnold's view of culture that all

folks have culture. Thus, culture makes up from knowledge and experience and henceforth, is displayed by habits, capabilities, expressions, greetings, parting and other rituals observed in a cultural group.

In addition, subculture or co-culture, nation, race and ethnic group are the terms related to the definition of culture which are distinctively different to each other. In this regard, Koester and Lustig (2010) refer nation to political and geographical territory with legal mechanism for regulating the behavior of its people which cannot be called culture, while race exclusively refers to physical similarities like skin color or eye shape that separate them from others which is not culture in any way (30). But sometimes race and culture go hand in hand by forming separate cultural groups. On the contrary, ethnicity concerns with the share of language, historical origins, nation-state that may form culture depending on other common habits and customs they share. Herewith, subculture contains minor racial and ethnic groups who share their own ethnic or racial culture and also some aspects of larger culture. For example, African Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos are the several subculture groups within the United States. It means that the above mentioned cultural groups in the USA exhibit African, Arabian and Asian culture share a little chunk of larger American native culture in the United States of America. Hence, in a country or nation, more than one subculture or co-cultural group may exist. Based on the definition of culture discussed earlier, this paper attempts culturally analyses the characters and situations found in the novel—*Lost in Translation: A Life in a New language*. Every character and incident mentioned in the novel displays particular cultural tenets which will be analyzed in the next paragraph.

Cultural analysis of different characters and situations of the novel

Characters in *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* adhere to Polish, Canadian and American cultural norms, values and perspectives. In this context, social psychologist of Jerusalem—Shalom H. Schwartz (2007) presents ten Basic Human Values that motivate individual's actions and behaviours, viz. *Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism* (4-9). Another psychologist of Netherlands, Greet Hofstede (2011) puts six dimensions to analyses cross-cultural relationships called *Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint* (9).

Mr. Rosenberg in *Lost in Translation* is one of the Polish Jews who migrated to Canada after WW II. Mr. Rosenberg's success by doing business of junk peddling and real estate makes him millionaire that secures a high position in the Community of Polish Jew and he demands money from Wyrda's (changed name of Eva in the novel) father for train tickets and also asks Wyrda family to move to new address (Hoffman 102-03) might be culturally analysed that Mr. Rosenberg thinks only for himself and he does not think it viable to spend money for Wyrda's family though Wyrda and her family belongs to Rosenberg's same country, language and culture. Such kind of materialistic attitude and behaviour is termed as Masculinity and

Individualistic and Long-term Oriented person by Hofstede, while Schwartz calls it as an attitude related to Security and Conformity. To Schwartz, Mr. Rosenberg is not ready to lose money as well as his social security and conformity for the sake of Wyrda and her family.

On the contrary, Mr. Rosenberg speaks 'Yiddish' (Hoffman 103)—a language used by Jews in central and Eastern Europe before the holocaust of WW II. The habit of using 'Yiddish' shows Mr. Rosenberg as a person who cannot forget his native language and culture even living abroad for a long time. Schwartz calls such behaviour as traditional cultural tie. In addition, Mr. Rosenberg dispenses business advices to people, "as if it were precious currency given away free" (Hoffman 103) and he assigns an inferior basement room for living of Wyrda's family which proves him authoritative person who imposes economic and social hegemony to subordinates. Such kind of person does not look other in equal status i.e., he loves Power Distance—a term used by Hofstede in explaining cultural demonstration. For Hofstede, there is an existence of culture in which it is believed that there should be a distance between high officials and low officials.

Again, out of many Polish-born Canadian living in Canada after WW II, only Mr. Rosenberg goes to receive Wyrda family and gives them shelter which proves him a benevolent (Schwartz 8) person who loves humanity and collective interest of the society and such kind of attitude is also termed as feminine and collective culture by Hofstede. After a week, Mr. Rosenberg tells Wyrda's father that it is wise to find a home somewhere else where he can stay and start earning some money to support his living expenses. This attitude of Mr. Rosenberg can prove him individualistic (Hofstede 9) person who thinks only for himself, nothing else.

However, the author finds Mrs. Rosenberg and her daughter as quite helping personalities. Mrs. Rosenberg and her daughter Diane feed Wyrda's family well. When Wyrda and her younger sister return from school, according to Polish culture Mrs. Rosenberg put two glasses of milk for them. She also gives old dresses to Wyrda and her sister. In addition, Mrs. Rosenberg and her daughter are not happy to hear that Mr. Rosenberg has asked Wyrda family to leave their house. With all these behavioural patterns, it might be argued that Mrs. Rosenberg and her daughter culturally belong to hedonism, benevolence and universalism in Schwartz's value theory that finds a person having sympathetic feeling for others and collectivism, femininity, short-term orientation and indulgence in Hofstede's model that examines a non-fanatic success drive mentality of an individual.

Whenever Wyrda and her sister go to the Canadian school, naturally they are startled by the presence of new atmosphere. Surprisingly enough, the teacher in Canadian school convinces them not to worry by exchanging "reassuring glances" (Hoffman, 105) to Wyrda and her sister which proves the teacher's culture as well as the Canadian culture as short-term oriented that accepts cultural change and risk of losing cultural heritage for the inclusion of foreign people in their native Canadian culture (Hofstede 9). A similar mentality the author finds in the attitude Canadian family Wyrda and her mother meet. On the very first day, the Canadian family invites unknown Wyrda family (Hoffman 108) that assures benevolent (Schwartz), collective, feminine, short-term oriented and indulgent (Hofstede) Canadian culture

that loves and accommodate people of other language and culture without any doubt and hesitation.

Similar notion of indulgent behavior the author find in the mentality of Wyrda's mother who belongs to Polish native culture. Wyrda's mother always says to Wyrda to say 'thank you' to other in return of getting something from her or him. The author argues that Wyrda's mother believes in universalism that means some culture notion like 'love for mother' and 'love for children' are accepted and appreciated in every cultural group of the world (Schwartz). Hoffman has given an example of such universal culture quoting Wyrda's mother's speech that "people like to be appreciated" (Hoffman 103). On the contrary, Wyrda's father respects Mr. Rosenberg as "certified millionaire" (Hoffman 104) and so Wyrda's father gives all the dollars to Mr. Rosenberg that places Wyrda's father as a person who believes in power distance i.e., there should be a distance between senior and junior (Hofstede 9).

Cross-cultural orientation and its effect

Continents, sub-continents, countries, nations, regions and every individual are distinctively different in attitude and thus different in culture. All cultures other than the individual culture are formed, built and established by the collective interest, philosophy, and goal, political and economic power. However, individual culture is formed only by experiences of new cultures and also by the attitude to new cultures. If an individual does not get acquaintance to new places and culture, she or he cannot have the comparative knowledge of various cultures. After getting acquaintances to new cultures, some get cultural shock and some get cultural revival. For Eva, when she lives in Poland, she forms and designs her own cultural identity and setting as Hofstede (2005) mentions "much of it was acquired in early childhood" (4). Thus at the initial stages it becomes impossible for Eva to accept new and discard her old culture. Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA) defines, "Intercultural competence enables you to interact both effectively and in a way that is acceptable to others when you are working in a group whose members have different cultural background" (5).

INCA (2004) assesses intercultural competence by analyzing six situations like tolerance of ambiguity, behavioral flexibility, communicative awareness, knowledge of discovery, respect for others and empathy. INCA has also put openness, knowledge and adaptability as intercultural competence assessment descriptors. Eva tries to adapt or internalize Canadian culture intuitively that might be similar to empathy (INCA).

American sociologist Milton J. Bennett (2004) defines cultural competence as a move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Ethnocentric persons believe in the superiority of own ethnic or cultural group and shows three attitudes which Bennett calls denial, defense and minimization. Ethnorelativist acquires the ability to accept and adapt different values and behaviors (2). After changing the name, Eva does not own it and she simply calls it "disembodied signs" or "identification tags" (Hoffman 105). Now Eva feels stranger to her changed name, as she calls it, "with names that make us strangers to ourselves" (Hoffman 105). It means that on the early stage, Eva

cannot accept the change or in other words, Eva does not have the idea of other culture which might go to the similar notion of Bennet's denial. When Eva argues that foreign language does not have "radiating haze" (Hoffman 106), it might alternatively be argued that native language has such association which is in defense section of Bennet. Successively, Wyrda becomes Eva in her whole life that might be argued that Eva has minimized her emotion and gradually accept and adapt other cultural existence which is termed as minimization by Bennet.

Apart from this, Psychologist John W. Berry (2005) speaks about cultural conflict and negotiation by defining acculturation. "Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (Berry 698)."

Berry terms the results of intercultural relation as integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization in one side and multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation and exclusion in other side. Eva calls Rosenberg, "not as our benefactor but as a Dickensian figure of personal tyranny, and my feeling towards him quickly rises to something that can only be called hate" (Hoffman 103). Eva cannot tolerate Rosenberg's authoritative, individualistic and stringy behavior and intuitively separates or marginalises or segregates or excludes him (Berry 698). Eva's first schooling in Canada changes her mentality tremendously, as she says, "a small, seismic mental shift" (Hoffman 105) occurs within the inner self of Eva. Thus, she is in the stage of cultural shock or separation (Berry 698). However, she is happy to see the attitudes of Mrs. Rosenberg who "puts two glasses of milk" for Eva and her sister when they returned from school (Hoffman 106). Eva also loves the positive attitude of school teacher, Canadian family and friend Penny. Thus, Eva integrates, assimilates and melts to Canadian culture (Berry 698) through the gradual process of acceptance and integration.

Cultural co-existence and its benefits shown in the novel

Mike Byram (1997) focuses on three components which are necessary for intercultural competence like knowledge, skills and attitudes. Eva has memory or knowledge of her native culture and language only. It is easy to learn First language and native culture but difficult to forget. In the same way, ethnic or native culture is easy to welcome and thus it is easier to disregard foreign culture. Gradually, as an individual, Eva gets acquainted to the overall circumstances and tries to minimize the gap between cultures and accept or assimilate the culture which is mentioned as cultural skill by Byram. Eva's family escapes holocaust and leaves Poland after the WW II. They have nothing to do in Poland and so gradually Eva and their family gain the intercultural competence and accept Canadian culture which can also be defined as cultural attitude by Byram.

After changing her name, Eva does not own it and she simply calls it "disembodied signs" or "identification tags" (Hoffman 105). Now she feels stranger to her changed name, as she calls it, "with names that make us strangers to ourselves" (Hoffman 105). Mother tongue always senses more lively to Eva as well as other individuals. However, foreign word does not have accumulated associations for them. Eva says, foreign language has no "radiating haze" (Hoffman 106). She mentions Ferdinand de

Saussure's linguistic signifier and signified from which we can get the idea of her linguistic knowledge. Eva thinks that foreign language should not be translated to mother tongue. Language cannot be memorized; language should be sensed and felt by associated images according "to the feeling from which it springs" (Hoffman 107). The author also perceives Eva's knowledge of philosophy and astrology by her reference to "Platonic Stratosphere", "desiccating alchemy", "radical disjoining between word and thing" (Hoffman 107). Eva says, in new language, "it is a loss of a living connection" (Hoffman 107) with someone's language and culture that indirectly signify the title of the novel—*Lost in Translation*. Thus, there are some benefits along with the challenges of cultural co-existence in a diversified cultural group.

Conclusion

Living in a diversified cultural group is full of challenges and such cultural mixing offers some benefits of understanding intercultural communicative competence. In the novel, the author finds that Eva and her family had nothing to do but leave Poland and migrate to Canada after the holocaust of WW II. This strange and different linguistic and cultural circumstance pushes Eva and her family in a challenging and daunting atmosphere. However, by discarding as well as accepting foreign culture, Eva gets diverse cultural orientation that successively paves her ways for building cultural awareness for successful and effective intercultural communications.

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