

# Multicultural and Multilingualism: A Study of Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*

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## Abstract

Multicultural co-existence has become the new normal now. Globalization has led to thousands of people migrating from one culture to another to seek a better lifestyle. The process of immigration colors the already co-existing cultures in the target society. Language change is one of the various effects of immigration, others being the change in dressing style, food habits, belief system, socioeconomic standard, etc. These changes can be positive and negative depending upon whether the acculturation process is self-chosen or imposed on the migrants. Multicultural education, with the changing societal trends, has now been adopted by almost every educational institute. Groups of people share the values, traditions, and belief systems of their respective cultures by using language as a medium of communication. Language is the star player in the game of globalization that decides its success or failure. This paper aims to analyze the representation of the effects of multiculturalism on the nature of languages used by the different people in Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*. The paper also aims to highlight the reason for adopting more than one language, by the people of minority culture, based on the nature of the decision to acculturate, using Berry's four-fold model of acculturation.

**Keywords-** Multiculturalism, Multilingualism, Integration, Segregation, Assimilation, Marginalization.

## 1. Introduction

Culture is a gigantic term that has numerous meanings in different contexts. For instance, in sociology, culture means languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities, and memories developed by members of all social groups make their social environments meaningful. In psychology, it includes the ideas, attitudes, and behavior of the people who belong to the same group, which are passed on from one generation to another and then to the next, making one culture survive. The anthropologists define this term as the learned and shared behavior, values, traditions, and belief system of a group of people that share the same social, ethnic, or age attributes. Apart from these domains, culture also has a meaning in the context of communications. The scholars, for whom the culture is communication and the communication is culture, define this term as a system of shared knowledge passed on from one generation to another and shared by the members of a large group.

Multiculturalism is the co-existence of more than two cultures wherein every culture has a peaceful state of mind as the state takes the decisions keeping each culture in mind. The terms multiculturalism and pluralism are often considered as one and are used interchangeably, but there is a difference between the two. The similarity in both these terms is that there is a co-existence of more than two cultures in a state, and the difference is that in the latter, there is one dominant culture. The others are non-dominant, but people from every culture have equal stature and rights in the former. Canada is considered to be one state that has been practicing multiculturalism effectively. It is the nature of the policies issued Canadian government, according to J.W. Berry, that is in favor of every culture co-existing, which makes the country the first nation to have effective and peaceful multiculturalism effectively.

Language is an essential aspect of a culture that an immigrant who wills to assimilate or integrate learns first. According to the linguistic society of America, Multilingualism is synonymous with bilingualism that is when an individual is perfect in two mono-linguists. These people, according to this society, have perfection in 'more than one language. In a book named 'Twelve lectures on multilingualism,' Singleton and Aronin, the editors, define the term.

Multilingualism is a complex, vibrant and ever-intriguing phenomenon. Today, the significance of multilingualism has spilled over its local and private roles into a much broader, global importance. It is one of the essential social practices in the world. The term multilingualism is used here to refer to the use of three and more languages and is distinguished, where appropriate, from bilingualism, the use of two languages. In this perspective, bilingualism is taken to be a special case of multilingualism rather than vice versa. (3)

John Widdup Berry has studied acculturation in extreme detail. He has given a four-fold acculturation model that has become one of the main pillars of acculturation theory. He gave this model in a society where there is one dominant society and the other is non-dominant. However, the theory is relevant in the present situation of a society where more than one cultures co-exist. According to his model, acculturation has four sub-processes: *assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization*. In his 1974 paper, Berry has given a table.

Dimension 1: Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?			
Dimension 2: Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>INTEGRATION</b>	<b>ASSIMILATION</b>
	<b>No</b>	<b>SEPARATION</b>	<b>MARGINALIZATION</b>

In this table, Berry divides acculturation based on two dimensions. The first one is whether the immigrants maintain any relationship with the culture of origin. Moreover, the second one is whether there is any relation built with the majority of the dominant culture. Berry divides the processes into

two sub-categories of each, namely melting pot and pressure cooker as the types of assimilation, self-segregation and complete segregation as the types of segregation, democratic pluralism and paternal integration as the types of integration and marginality and deculturation as the types of marginalization. Berry states the meanings of these the sub-categories or types of each one of the bases on the question of whether the choice to pick any of the four processes are made by the people of minority culture themselves, or it is forced upon or imposed on them by the people of the majority culture. Although these types applied to a bi-cultured society where one culture dominates, this, nowadays, is also applicable to the modern multicultural society. This situation directly affects the language spoken by the people of all the cultures that co-exist in that society. There have been made several theories in the field of language and identities. In his research paper "Linguistic Diversity, Pluralism and National Development in Africa," BS Chumbow stated that "The process is

characterized by the maintenance and consolidation of the linguistic

Moreover, cultural identities of ethnolinguistic communities at the microplanning level while constructing a pluralistic national identity at the macro-planning level." (Chumbow 1) Talking about the African state, Chumbow goes a step further by stating that culture and language form an individual and group identity. In a book titled *Linguistic Minorities, Policies, and Pluralism: Applied Language Studies*, the author very specifically mentions that the cultural environment an individual lives in colors the linguistic identity of that individual. He, giving an example, says, "To cite an example of their influence, we could consider the Celtic revival movements of the late nineteenth century. Romantic, nationalist, idealist in nature, they clearly endorsed sentiments which had gained currency a century and more before." (Edwards 2)

In a post-war traumatic situation, Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, the Buloh family migrates from Slovenia to Australia, like many other families of different nations, searching for a better and peaceful life. The Buloh family includes Bojan Buloh, the father of the protagonist, Sonja, the three-year-old protagonist, and Maria Buloh, the protagonist's mother. The latter leaves the house when Sonja is just three years old the story. The society they migrate to has various other cultures like American, Italian, Australian, etc. Thus, people from various cultures come and interact with each other. The condition of the individuals, out of these people, depends on the choice they make out of the four acculturation processes. Moreover, that condition, in turn, colors the social, economic, political, and linguistic identity of that individual. Bojan, for instance, initially chooses to assimilate, but his previous identity intervenes, and he is unable to assimilate. Later he chooses to segregate himself and fails again because of the influence of the dominant culture. Thirdly, he chooses to integrate both cultures, but by then, the people of both cultures reject him, and finally, he is left with the only option of *marginalization*. Hence, in the end, he is heard saying that he has no place to go as he has no home of his own and is confused as to which language he should use. Thus, the people of other cultures affect the linguistic and cultural identity of Bojan.

Bojan tries to converse in English with the people, although his English is very poor. Not only that, he chooses to think loudly in English when there is no one around to listen to him. (110) He feels proud to be a part of Australia and get away from the Slovenian culture of origin, including the language

of his home culture. (85) He continuously pressurizes his daughter Sonja to learn English and not talk in Slovenian, going to the extent of buying a set of 'Encyclopedia Britannica' for her (215) so that their daughter becomes fluent in the native language that is English. Giving the book to Sonja, Bojan says, "Now you learn the English good." He feels proud of the fact that his daughter will now be fluent in English. (215) Once Sonja bids him goodbye in Slovenian, he replies to her back in Aussie English (319). Then comes a phase when Bojan realizes that he cannot learn English and he should stick with his mother tongue. He starts to *self-segregate* himself, and he also realizes that he is not only not comfortable with English, but his family members also feel uncomfortable. Maria soothes her infant daughter by saying, "Aja, Aja" (2). One day while playing, Sonja says, "Turks kava for Artie— turksa kava for Mama— turksa kava for Sonja." (31)

The Australian culture was dominant, which is why the color of the Australian language, English, can be seen in the lifestyle of the characters of the novel. However, when the phase of integration comes in the life of Bojan and his family, the influence of American, Italian, and other cultures can also be seen. Bojan's neighbors are American, and Sonja and the daughter of the Heaney's develop a good acquaintance. Moira Heaney teaches her American accent to Sonja, which remains with the latter throughout her life. Moreover, in turn, Sonja teaches her Slovenian words to Moira Heaney. (160) Sonja now speaks Aussie English and Slovenian with an American accent. However, when the stage of marginalization comes, Sonja can not figure out the language that should be used to convey her message and finally settles on a mid-way. (37) Bojan, the father of the protagonist Sonja, lost command over his mother tongue and could never learn the language of the dominant society or the culture. He says to Sonja, for whom he considers the English language that is the language of the dominant culture to be very important,

Perhaps you say this because you have plenty of words... You find a language. But I lose mine. And I never had enough words to tell people what I think, what I feel. Never enough words for a good job. (39)

After Bojan and his family go through these four acculturation processes, it is observed that they have developed a multilingual quality in them and are comfortable in every language. Bojan includes Italian phrases in his Slovenian, Tasmanian and American vocabulary. For example, Bojan speaks the Italian phrase "Madonna Santa" (389), incomplete drunkenness, which means good gods. However, there is no effect of the accent of the Italian language on the other languages that he uses.

... he was back in the FJ and the motor was misfiring and rattling as he was driving into the heart of the town., and he was just hoping to Christ that it got him there and praised it in Slovenian (Dobra staryr auto) for all its years of faithful service and beseeched it in Italian (Per favore cara macchina) to last the few more miles that would see their journey finally ended and ordered it on Deutsch (Raus! Raus!) to continue going and cursed it in Australian (shitfuckingbucket) for spluttering worse than himself in the morning. (412)

Cultural identity is shown by various elements like dressing style, language, accent, and beliefs. Language and accent that an individual uses are also a significant part of this cultural identity. The

analysis of Richard Flanagan's *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* with the lens of JW Berry's four-fold acculturation model shows that the multicultural environment affects an individual's lifestyle and that such an environment is directly proportional to the multilingualism nature of the individual. However, this also depends on whether the acculturation process is self-chosen or forced by the majority culture's people. The effect of a multicultural environment can be seen not only on the people of minority culture but also on the people of the majority culture. Bojan and Sonja from *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* are examples of immigrants whose lifestyle is colored by the multicultural environment. Multiculturalism and Cultural pluralism are used interchangeably as there is a co-existence of three or more cultures in a society. However, multilingualism is the outcome in both cases with maximum probability and hence is colored by both.

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