Part II
Cultural Linguistic Approaches to Language and Culture
5
Advances in Cultural Linguistics

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5.1 Introduction
This chapter provides an account of the development of Cultural Linguistics as a multidisciplinary area exploring the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisation. Cultural Linguistics grew out of an interest in integrating cognitive linguistics with the three traditions within linguistic anthropology of Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics, and the ethnography of speaking. In the last decade, Cultural Linguistics has also found strong common ground with cognitive anthropology, since both explore cultural models that characterise cultural groups. For Cultural Linguistics, many features of human languages are entrenched in cultural conceptualisations, including cultural models. In recent years, Cultural Linguistics has drawn on several disciplines and sub-disciplines, such as complexity science and distributed cognition, to enrich its theoretical understanding of the notion of cultural cognition. Applications of Cultural Linguistics have enabled fruitful investigations of the cultural grounding of language in several applied domains such as World Englishes, intercultural communication, and political discourse analysis. This chapter elaborates on these observations and provides illustrative examples of linguistic research from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics.

5.2 What is Cultural Linguistics?
Cultural Linguistics is a sub-discipline of linguistics with a multidisciplinary origin which explores the interface between language, culture, and conceptualisation (Palmer, 1996, this volume; Sharifian, 2011). While ‘cultural linguistics’ (without capitalisation) may be
used to refer to a broad, general area of interest in the relationship between language and culture, Cultural Linguistics explores, in explicit terms, *conceptualisations* that have a cultural basis and are encoded in and communicated through features of human languages. The pivotal focus on *conceptualisation* in Cultural Linguistics owes its centrality to cognitive linguistics, a discipline that Cultural Linguistics drew on at its inception.

The term ‘cultural linguistics’ was perhaps first used by a pioneer of cognitive linguistics, Ronald Langacker, in an argument emphasizing the relationship between cultural knowledge and grammar. He maintained that ‘the advent of cognitive linguistics can be heralded as a return to cultural linguistics. Cognitive linguistic theories recognise cultural knowledge as the foundation not just of lexicon, but central facets of grammar as well’ (Langacker, 1994, p. 31, original emphasis). Langacker (this volume) maintains that ‘while meaning is identified as conceptualisation, cognition at all levels is both embodied and culturally embedded’. In practice, however, the role of culture in shaping language and the influence of culture on all levels of language was not adequately and explicitly dealt with until the publication of *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics* (1996) by Gary B. Palmer, a linguistic anthropologist from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In this book, Palmer argued that cognitive linguistics can be directly applied to the study of language and culture. Central to Palmer’s proposal is the idea that ‘language is the play of verbal symbols that are based in imagery’ (Palmer, 1996, p. 3, emphasis added), and that this imagery is culturally constructed. Palmer argued that culturally defined imagery governs narrative, figurative language, semantics, grammar, discourse, and even phonology.

Palmer’s notion of imagery is not limited to visual imagery. As he puts it, ‘[i]magery is what we see in our mind’s eye, but it is also the taste of mango, the feel of walking in a tropical downpour, the music of *Mississippi Masala*’ (Palmer, 1996, p. 3). He adds, ‘phonemes are heard as verbal images arranged in complex categories; words acquire meanings that are relative to image schemas, scenes, and scenarios; clauses are image-based constructions; discourse emerges as a process governed by reflexive imagery of itself; and world view subsumes it all’ (Palmer, 1996, p. 4). Since for Palmer the notion of imagery captures conceptual units such as cognitive categories and schemas, my terminological preference is the term *conceptualisation* rather than imagery. I elaborate on my use of this term later in this chapter.
Palmer’s proposal called for close links between three traditions in anthropological linguistics and cognitive linguistics, as follows:

Cognitive linguistics can be tied into three traditional approaches that are central to anthropological linguistics: Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics (ethno science), and the ethnography of speaking. To the synthesis that results I have given the name cultural linguistics. (Palmer, 1996, p. 5, original emphasis)

Palmer’s proposal can be diagrammatically represented in Figure 5.1 below:

Boasian linguistics, named after the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, saw language as reflecting people’s mental life and culture. Boas observed that languages classify experiences differently and that these linguistic categories tend to influence the thought patterns of their speakers (Blount, 1995[1974]; Lucy, 1992). The latter theme formed the basis of later work by scholars such as Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. The views of the relationship between language and culture that have been attributed to this school of thought range from the theoretical position that language and culture shape human thought to one that regards human thought as influenced by language and culture. It is worth noting that although the former is often attributed to scholars such as Sapir and Whorf, in recent decades others have presented much more sophisticated accounts of the views held by these scholars (see Leavitt, forthcoming).

Figure 5.1 A diagrammatic representation of Palmer’s (1996) proposal for cultural linguistics
A related subfield is that of ethnosemantics, which is the study of the ways in which different cultures organise and categorise domains of knowledge, such as those of plants, animals, and kin (Palmer, 1996, p. 19). For example, several ethnosemanticists have extensively studied kinship classifications in Aboriginal languages of Australia and noted their complexity, relative to the kinship system classifications in varieties of English such as American English or Australian English (for example, Tonkinson, 1998). An important field of inquiry that is closely related to ethnosemantics is ethnobiology, which is the study of how plants and animals are categorised and used across different cultures (Berlin, 1992).

The ethnography of speaking, or the ethnography of communication, largely associated with the work of Dell Hymes (for example, 1974) and John Gumperz (for example, Gumperz and Hymes, 1972) explores culturally distinctive means and modes of speaking or communication in general. Hymes emphasised the role of socio-cultural context in the ways in which speakers perform communicatively. He argued that the competence that is required for the conduct of social life includes more than just the type of linguistic competence Chomskyan linguists studied. He proposed that a discussion of these factors be placed under the notion of communicative competence, which includes competence in ‘appropriate’ norms of language use in various socio-cultural contexts. Generally the three linguistic-anthropological traditions discussed so far ‘share an interest in the native’s point of view’ (Palmer, 1996, p. 26), and an interest in the socio-cultural grounding of language, although a number of anthropological linguists have simply focused on documenting lesser known languages (see Duranti, 2003 for a historical review).

Cognitive linguistics utilises several analytical tools from within the broad field of cognitive science, notably the notion of ‘schema’ (see also Blount, this volume). The concept of ‘schema’ has been very widely used in several disciplines and under different rubrics, and this has led to different understandings and definitions of the term. For cognitive linguists such as Langacker, schemas are abstract representations. For example, for him, a noun instantiates the schema of [[[THING]/[X]], whereas a verb instantiates the schema of [[[PROCESS]/[X]]. In classical paradigms of cognitive psychology, however, schemas are considered more broadly as building blocks of cognition used for storing, organising, and interpreting information (for example, Bartlett, 1932; Bobrow and Norman, 1975; Minsky, 1975; Rumelhart, 1980). Image schemas, on the other hand, are regarded as recurring cognitive structures which
establish patterns of understanding and reasoning, often elaborated by
extension from our knowledge of our bodies as well as our experience
of social interactions (for example, Johnson, 1987). An example of this
would be to understand the body or parts of the body as ‘containers’.
Such an understanding is reflected in expressions like: ‘with a heart full
of happiness’. Another analytical tool used in cognitive linguistics is
the ‘conceptual metaphor’, which is closely associated with the work of
Lakoff, and to a lesser extent Johnson (for example, Lakoff and Johnson,
1980). Conceptual metaphors are defined as cognitive structures that
allow us to conceptualise and understand one conceptual domain in
terms of another. For instance, the English metaphorical expressions:
‘heavy-hearted and light-hearted’, reflect the conceptual metaphor of
HEART AS THE SEAT OF EMOTION. In proposing the framework of cultural
linguistics, Palmer persuasively argued that it is likely that all these con-
ceptual structures have a cultural basis. His own work has been based
on the analysis of cases from such diverse languages as Tagalog, Coeur
d’Alene, and Shona (for example, Palmer 1996, 2003).

Although Palmer believed that the link with cognitive linguistics could
provide Cultural Linguistics with a solid cognitive perspective, ‘cogni-
tive linguistics has received criticism for not having a strong cognitive
base, in the areas of cognitive representations, structure, and processes
(for example, Peeters, 2001). The ambiguity here lies in different inter-
pretations of the term ‘cognitive’. What makes studies associated with
mainstream cognitive linguistics ‘cognitive’ is their emphasis on cogni-
tive conceptualisation, whereas studies of cognitive processing in the sub-
field of psycholinguistics are more likely to emphasise non-conceptual
phenomena, such as response time and strength of response.

In recent years, Cultural Linguistics has drawn on several other disci-
plines and sub-disciplines towards developing a theoretical framework
that would offer an integrated understanding of the notions of ‘cogni-
tion’ and ‘culture’, as they relate to language. This framework that may
be referred to as cultural cognition and language (Sharifian, 2008b, 2009b,
2011) proposes a view of cognition that has life at the level of culture,
under the concept of cultural cognition.

Cultural cognition draws on a multidisciplinary understanding of
the collective cognition that characterises a cultural group. Several
cognitive scientists have moved beyond the level of the individual,
working on cognition as a collective entity (for example, Clark and
Chalmers, 1998; Sutton, 2005, 2006; Wilson, 2005). Other schol-
ars, working in the area of complex science often under the rubric
of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), have been seeking to explain
how relationships between parts, or agents, give rise to the collective
behaviours of a system or group (for example, Holland, 1995; Waldrop,
1992). A number of scholars, notably Hutchins (1994), have explored
the notion of ‘distributed cognition’, including factors external to the
human organism, such as technology and the environment, in their
definition of cognition (see also Borofsky, 1994 and Palmer, 2006 for
the notion of distributed knowledge in relation to language). Drawing
on all this work, Sharifian (2008b, 2009b, 2011) offers a model of
cultural cognition that establishes criteria for distinguishing between
what is cognitive and what is cultural and the relationship between
the two in the domain of Cultural Linguistics.

Cultural cognition embraces the cultural knowledge that emerges
from the interactions between members of a cultural group across time
and space. Apart from the ordinary sense of ‘emergence’ here, cultural
cognition is emergent in the technical sense of the term (for example,
Goldstein, 1999). In other words, cultural cognition is the cognition
that results from the interactions between parts of the system (the
members of a group) which is more than the sum of its parts (more
than the sum of the cognitions of the individual members). Like all
emergent systems, cultural cognition is dynamic in that it is constantly
being negotiated and renegotiated within and across the generations of
the relevant cultural group, as well as through the contact that members
of that group have with other cultures.

Language is a central aspect of cultural cognition as it serves, to use
the term used by wa Thiong’o (1986), as a ‘collective memory bank’ of
the cultural cognition of a group. Many aspects of language are shaped
by the cultural cognition that prevailed at earlier stages in the history
of a speech community. Historical cultural practices leave traces in cur-
rent linguistic practice, some of which are in fossilised forms that may
no longer be analysable. In this sense language can be viewed as storing
and communicating cultural cognition. In other words language acts
both as a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the (re-)transmission of
cultural cognition and its component parts or cultural conceptualisations,
a term elaborated upon in the following section.

5.3 Cultural conceptualisations

The analytical tools that have proved useful in examining aspects of cultural
cognition and its instantiation in language are ‘cultural schema’, ‘cultural
category’ (including ‘cultural prototype’), and ‘cultural metaphor’. I refer to
these collectively as cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian, 2011). Consistent
with the view of cultural cognition discussed earlier in this chapter, these analytical tools are seen as existing at the collective level of cultural cognition, as well as that of the individual. Cultural conceptualisations and their entrenchment in language are intrinsic to cultural cognition.

The notions of schema and conceptual metaphor were discussed earlier in this chapter. The following section elaborates on the notion of ‘cultural schema’ and discusses how it relates to language.

5.3.1 Cultural schemas and language

Cultural schemas are a culturally constructed sub-class of schemas; that is, they are abstracted from a cultural group’s cultural, and therefore to some extent shared, experiences, as opposed to being abstracted from an individual’s idiosyncratic experiences. They enable individuals to communicate cultural meanings. In terms of their development and their representation, at the macro level, cultural schemas emerge from interactions between the members of a cultural group, while they are constantly negotiated and renegotiated across time and space. At the micro level, each individual has internalised their own share of these macro-level schemas, albeit in a heterogeneously distributed fashion. That is, individuals who belong to the same cultural group may share some, but not all, components of a cultural schema. In other words, each person’s internalisation of a macro-level cultural schema is to some extent collective and to some extent idiosyncratic. This pattern may be diagrammatically presented in Figure 5.2:

![Diagram of Cultural Schemas](image)

*Figure 5.2 Diagrammatic representation of a cultural schema (adapted from Sharifian, 2011)*
Figure 5.2 shows how a cultural schema may be represented in a heterogeneously distributed fashion across the minds of individuals. It schematically represents how members may have internalised some but not all components of a macro-level cultural schema. It also shows how individuals may share some of, but not all, the elements of a cultural schema with each other. It is to be noted that the individuals who internalise aspects of a cultural schema may not only be those who are viewed as the insiders by the cultural group. ‘Outsiders’ who have somehow had contact and interaction with the group can also internalise aspects of these cultural schemas.

Besides its pivotal use in Cultural Linguistics, the notion of ‘cultural schema’ has also been adopted as a key analytical tool in cognitive anthropology (for example, D’Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1996; Strauss and Quinn, 1997; see also Blount, 2011, this volume). For cognitive anthropologists culture is a cognitive system, and thus the notion of ‘cultural schema’ provides a useful tool to explore cognitive schemas that are culturally constructed across different societies and cultural groups. A term that closely overlaps with cultural schema and has again received major attention in cognitive anthropology is that of the ‘cultural model’ (for example, D’Andrade, 1995; D’Andrade and Strauss, 1992; Holland and Quinn, 1987). This term, which was initially intended to displace the term ‘folk models’ (Keesing, 1987), has also been employed in the sense of ‘a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group’ (D’Andrade, 1987, p. 112). D’Andrade constantly refers to the notion of ‘schema’ in his explication of the term ‘cultural model’ (ibid.) and he regards models as complex cognitive schemas. Strauss and Quinn (1997, p. 49) also maintain that ‘another term for cultural schemas (especially of the more complex sort) is ‘cultural model’”. Polzenhagen and Wolf (2007), however, have used the notion of ‘cultural model’ to represent more general, overarching conceptualisations encompassing metaphors and schemas which are minimally complex.

An example of the use of cultural models in cognitive anthropology is the exploration of the cultural model of American marriage. For example, Quinn (1987) observes that the American cultural model of marriage is based on metaphors such as MARRIAGE IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY, reflected in statements such as ‘this marriage is at a dead end’.

From the outset, the notion of ‘cultural schema’ proved to be pivotal to Cultural Linguistics. In Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics, Palmer (1996, p. 63) maintained that ‘[i]t is likely that all native knowledge of language and culture belongs to cultural schemas and the living of...
culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action'. Cultural schemas capture encyclopaedic meaning that is culturally constructed for many lexical items of human languages. Take an example of the word 'privacy' in a variety of English such as American English. The pool of knowledge that forms a web of concepts that define 'privacy' in relation to various contexts and factors is best described as the cultural schema of PRIVACY. The cultural construction of this schema is partly reflected in complaints that some speakers make about members of some other cultural groups, such as ‘they don’t understand the meaning of privacy’.

Cultural schemas may also provide a basis for pragmatic meanings, in the sense that, knowledge which underlies the enactment and uptake of speech acts and that is assumed to be culturally shared is largely captured in cultural schemas. In some languages, for example, the speech act of ‘greeting’ is closely associated with cultural schemas of ‘eating’ and ‘food’, whereas in some other languages it is associated with cultural schemas that relate to the health of the interlocutors and their family members. The available literature in the area of pragmatics makes very frequent references to ‘inference’ and ‘shared assumptions’ as the basis for the communication of pragmatic meanings. It goes without saying that making assumptions about the knowledge of listeners are technically based on the general assumption that shared cultural schemas are necessary for making sense of speech acts. In short, cultural schemas capture pools of knowledge that provide a basis for a significant portion of semantic and pragmatic meanings in human languages.

5.3.2 Cultural categories and language

Another class of cultural conceptualisation is that of the cultural category. Categorisation is one of the most fundamental human cognitive activities. It begins, albeit in an idiosyncratic way, early in life. Many studies have investigated how children engage in categorising objects and events early in life (Mareschal, Powell, and Volein, 2003). Children usually begin by setting up their own categories but as they grow up, as part of their cognitive development, they explore and discover how their language and culture categorise events, objects, and experiences. As Glushko et al. (2008, p. 129) put it:

Categorisation research focuses on the acquisition and use of categories shared by a culture and associated with language—what we will call ‘cultural categorisation’.

Cultural categories exist for objects, events, settings, mental states, properties, relations and other components of experience (e.g. birds, weddings, parks, serenity, blue and above). Typically, these categories are acquired through normal exposure to caregivers and culture with little explicit instruction.

The categorisation of many objects, events and experiences, such as ‘food’, ‘vegetables’, ‘fruit’, and so on, and their prototype instances, are culturally constructed. It is to be noted that the reference to ‘wedding’ as a category in the above quotation is distinct from the use of this word in relation to cultural schemas. The ‘wedding’ as a cultural category refers to the type of event that is opposed to ‘engagement’ or ‘dining out’, for example. ‘Wedding’ as a cultural schema includes all the other aspects of the event, such as the procedures that need to be followed, the sequence of events, the roles played by various participants and expectations associated with those roles.

As for the relationship between cultural categories and language, many lexical items of human languages act as labels for the categories and their instances. As mentioned above, in English the word ‘food’ refers to a category, and a word such as: ‘steak’ is an instance of that category. Usually categories form networks and hierarchies, in that instances of a category can themselves serve as categories with their own instances. For example, ‘pasta’ is an instance of the category of ‘food’ with its own instances, such as ‘penne’ or ‘rigatoni’.

Apart from lexical items, in some languages cultural categories are marked by noun classifiers. For example, Murrinh-Patha, an Australian Aboriginal language, uses ten noun classes, which are reflective of Murrinh-Patha cultural categorisation (Street, 1987; Walsh, 1993). These categories are identified through noun class markers that appear before the noun. The following list from Walsh (1993, p. 110) includes the class markers and the definition of each category:

1. Kardu: Aboriginal people and human spirits
2. Ku: Non-Aboriginal people and all other animates and their products.
3. Kura: Potable fluid (i.e., ‘fresh water’) and collective terms for fresh water (i.e., ‘rain’, ‘river’).
4. mi: Flowers and fruits of plants and any vegetable foods. Also faeces.
5. thamul: Spears.
6. thu: Offensive weapons (defensive weapons belong to nanthi), thunder and lightning, playing cards.
7. thungku: Fire and things associated with fire.
8. *da*: Place and season (i.e. dry grass time).
9. *murrinh*: Speech and language and associated concepts such as song and news.
10. *nanthi*: A residual category including whatever does not fit into the other nine categories.

The above categorisation also allows for multiple membership in the sense that depending on its function, a noun may be categorised into one class at one time and another class at another. For instance, a boomerang may be categorised as *nanthi* when it is used as a back-scratcher and *thu* when it is used as an offensive weapon (Walsh, 1993). Also in the Dreamtime Creation stories, when the Ancestor beings turned into animals while engaged in their journey of creating the natural world, this change is signalled by a switch from one noun class into another.

This system of noun classification is entrenched in Murrinh-Patha cultural categorisation, which in turn is based on the Murrinh-Patha worldview. For instance, as Walsh argues, the fact that fresh water, fire, and language are classified separately indicates that each holds a prominent place in the culture of the Murrinh-Patha.

Apart from noun classifiers, there are pronouns in many Aboriginal languages that reflect cultural categories, through marking moiety, generation level, and relationship. In Arabana, as an example, the pronoun *arnanthara*, which may be glossed into English as ‘kinship-we’, captures the following complex category:

Arnanthara = we, who belong to the same matrilineal moiety, adjacent generation levels, and who are in the basic relationship of mother, or mothers’ brother and child. (Hercus, 1994, p. 117)

In Arabana, this cultural categorisation of kin groups is also marked on the second plural kinship pronoun *aranthara* and the third-person plural kinship pronoun *karananthara*. These examples clearly reveal how some cultural categories are encoded in the grammatical system of a language (see also Lakoff, 1987).

### 5.3.3 Cultural-conceptual metaphors and language

As mentioned earlier, conceptual metaphor refers to the cognitive conceptualisation of one domain in terms of another (for example, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Extensive research in cognitive linguistics has shown how even our basic understanding of ourselves and our surroundings is mediated by conceptual metaphors. For example, in
clock-and-calendar, industrial cultures, time is commonly understood
in terms of a commodity, money, a limited resource, and so on. This is
reflected in expressions such as ‘buying time’, ‘saving time’, and the like.
More importantly our understanding of ourselves is achieved through
crceptual metaphors. For example we can conceptualise our thoughts,
feelings, personality traits, and so on in terms of our body parts.
Research in Cultural Linguistics is interested in exploring conceptual
metaphors that are culturally constructed (for example, Palmer, 1996;
Sharifian, 2011), which I refer to as cultural metaphors. Several studies
have explored cultural schemas and models that give rise to concep-
tual metaphors, for example through ethnomedical or other cultural
traditions (Sharifian et al., 2008; Yu, 2009a, 2009b). For example, in
Indonesian it is *hati* ‘the liver’ that is associated with love, rather than
the heart (Siahaan, 2008). Siahaan traces back such conceptualisations
to the ritual of animal sacrifice, especially the interpretation of liver
organ known as ‘liver divination’, which was practised in ancient
Indonesia. In some languages, such as Tok Pisin (Muhlhausler, Dutton,
and Romaine, 2003), the belly is the seat of emotions. Yu (2009b)
observes that many linguistic expressions in Chinese reflect the con-
ceptualisation of the heart as the ruler of the body. He maintains that
the ‘target-domain concept here is an important one because the heart
is regarded as the central faculty of cognition and the site of both affect-
tive and cognitive activities in ancient Chinese philosophy’ (Yu, 2007,
p. 27). Studies of such cultural conceptualisations are currently gather-
ing further momentum (for example, Idström and Piirainen, 2012).
It should be noted here that the cognitive processing of conceptual
metaphor is rather a complex issue to explore. While the use of the term
‘metaphor’ here highlights the involvement of two distinct domains of
experience (that is: source and target) it does not follow that every use
of an expression that is associated with a conceptual metaphor involves
the on-line cognitive process of mapping from one domain to another.
Some cases of conceptual metaphors are simply ‘fossilised’ conceptuali-
sations that represented active insight at some stage in the history of
the cultural cognition of a group. Such metaphors do not imply current
speakers of the language have any conscious awareness of their cultural
roots, or are engaged in any conceptual mapping when they use them.
In such cases, the conceptual metaphors may rather serve as a cultural
schema which guides thinking about and helps with understanding
domains of experience. In some other cases, the expressions that are
associated with such cultural conceptualisations may be considered
simply as figures of speech.
As for the relationship between cultural-conceptual metaphors and language, it is clear from the above discussion that many aspects of human languages are closely linked with cultural metaphors. In fact, Cultural Linguistics and cognitive linguistics rely heavily on linguistic data for the exploration of conceptual metaphor. As mentioned above, the language of emotion (for example, *you broke my heart*) largely reflects culturally mediated conceptualisations of emotions and feelings in terms of body parts.

In short, Cultural Linguistics explores human languages and language varieties to examine features that draw on cultural conceptualisations such as cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural-conceptual metaphors, from the perspective of the theoretical framework of cultural cognition. While the ultimate aim of Cultural Linguistics is to examine the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisations thus far, Cultural Linguistics perspective has been used in several areas of applied linguistics. The following sections present brief summaries of a Cultural Linguistics framework that has been applied to World Englishes, intercultural communication, and political discourse analysis.

5.4 Cultural Linguistics and research into varieties of English

Cultural Linguistics has offered a ground breaking approach to the exploration of varieties of English, based on the premise that varieties of English may be distinct from each other at the level of cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian, 2005, 2006). Malcolm and Rochecouste (2000) identified a number of distinctive cultural schemas in the discourse produced by a number of speakers of Australian Aboriginal English. These schemas included: Travel, Hunting, Observing, Scary Things, Gathering, Problem Solving, Social Relationships, and Smash (an Aboriginal English word for a fight). The first four schemas were found to occur most frequently in the data.

Wolf and Polzenhagen (Polzenhagen and Wolf, 2007; Wolf, 2008; Wolf and Polzenhagen, 2009) have explored conceptualisations of the African cultural model of community in African varieties of English. Wolf (2008, p. 368) maintains that this ‘cultural model involves a cosmology and relates to such notions as the continuation of the community, the members of the community, witchcraft, the acquisition of wealth, and corruption, which find expression in African English’. For example, by examining a number of expressions in Cameroon English (for example: ‘they took bribes from their less fortunate brothers’), Wolf observes that
the central conceptual metaphors in that variety of English are KINSHIP IS

Sharifian (2005, 2008a) examined cultural conceptualisations in
English spoken by a group of Aboriginal students who, because they
sounded like speakers of Australian English, were not identified by their
teachers as Aboriginal English speakers. Through a study of word asso-
ciation, however, he found that English words such as ‘family’, ‘home’,
‘shame’ evoked cultural conceptualisations in these students that were
predominantly those that are associated with Aboriginal English rather
than Australian English. For example, for Aboriginal students the word
‘family’ appeared to be associated with categories in Aboriginal English
that extend far beyond what is described as the ‘nuclear’ family, which
is the central notion in Anglo-Australian culture. Consider the follow-
ing table of data (Table 5.1) from Sharifian (2005):

| Table 5.1 | A comparison of Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian meanings for
<p>| Aboriginal | Anglo-Australian |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus word: Family</th>
<th>Stimulus word: Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Love your pop, love your nan, love our mums, love our dads.</td>
<td>• You got brothers and sisters in your family and your mum and dad, and you have fun with your family, have dinner with your family, you go out with your family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brothers, sisters, auntie, uncles, nan, pops, father, nephew and nieces.</td>
<td>• Dad, mum, brother, dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They’re there for you, when you need ‘m they look after you, you call ‘m auntie and uncle an cousins.</td>
<td>• Mum, and dad, brother and sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People, mums, dads, brother, group of families, like aunties and uncles, nanas and pops.</td>
<td>• Fathers, sisters, parents, caring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’ve got lots of people in my family, got a big family, got lots of family.</td>
<td>• People, your mum and dad, and your sister and brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My family, you know how many family I got? One thousand millions, hundred ninety-nine million thousand thousand nine nine sixty-one … million million,</td>
<td>• All my family, my brothers and sisters, my mum and my dad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncle, Joe, Stacy, … cousins, uncles, sisters, brothers, girlfriends and my million sixty-one thousand family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I like my family, all of my family, my aunties an’ uncles and cousins, and I like Dryandra.</td>
<td>• Kids, mums, dads, sisters, brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Just having family that is Nyungar [an Aboriginal cultural group] and meeting each other.</td>
<td>• Mother, sister, brother, life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mum, dad, my brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I think of all the people in my family [F: Who are they? I: My mum, my dad, and my sister].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They have a house, they have a car, they have their kitchen, their room, their toilet, their backyard, their carport, they have a dog and a cat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses given by Aboriginal participants instantiate the Aboriginal cultural schema of family as they refer to members of their extended family, such as aunts and uncles. The responses from the Anglo-Australian participants suggest that the word ‘family’ is, in most cases, restricted to the ‘nuclear family’, while sometimes house pets are also included. Responses such as *they’re there for you, when you need ’m they look after you* by Aboriginal participants reflect the responsibilities of care that are very alive between the members of an extended Aboriginal family. Uncles and aunties often play a large role in an individual’s upbringing. The closeness of an Aboriginal person to a range of people in his or her extended family members is also reflected in the patterns of responses where the primary responses refer to uncles and aunties or nana and pop instead of father and mother. Responses such as *my million sixty-one thousand family* and *I’ve got lots of people in my family* reflect the extended coverage of the concept of ‘family’ in the Aboriginal conceptualisation. The word ‘home’ appeared to be mainly associated with family relationships rather than ‘an attitude to a building’ used as a dwelling by a nuclear family.

Cultural Linguistics has also been recently used in compiling a dictionary of Hong Kong English. In a very innovative project, Cummings and Wolf (2011) have identified and included underlying cultural conceptualisations for many of the words included in the dictionary. The following is an example of an entry in the dictionary:

**Spirit money** (also *paper money, hell money, hell bank notes*)

*Fixes expressions, n.*

Definition. Fake money burned in a ritual offering to the dead

Text example: ‘An offering of oranges may be peeled and placed on the grave, together with paper money. Finally, crackers are let off.’

**Underlying conceptualisations:** A SUPERNATURAL BEING IS A HUMAN BEING, A PAPER MODEL IS A REAL OBJECT IN THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD [TARGET DOMAIN > SUPERNATURAL BEING, PAPER MODEL] [SOURCE DOMAIN > HUMAN BEING, OBJECT IN THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD].

(Ibid., pp. 163–64)

This groundbreaking step in the tradition of dictionary compilation allows readers to become familiar with the cultural conceptualisations that underlie certain expressions in the given language or the language variety. But, of course, in many cases the underlying conceptualisations themselves have their roots in certain cultural traditions, including that of religion and spirituality.
5.5 Cultural Linguistics and intercultural communication

Intercultural communication has in the past been extensively studied from the perspective of linguistic anthropology. Gumperz (for example, 1982, 1991) introduced the notion of ‘contextualisation cues’ as an analytical tool for exploring intercultural communication/miscommunication. He defines these cues as ‘verbal and non-verbal metalinguistic signs that serve to retrieve the context-bound presuppositions in terms of which component messages are interpreted’ (Gumperz, 1996, p. 379). Central to this notion is the importance of the ‘indirect inferences’ speakers make during intercultural communication as they rely on linguistic and non-linguistic cues.

From the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, making indirect inferences during intercultural communication is largely facilitated by shared cultural conceptualisations on the part of interlocutors. Cultural conceptualisations provide a basis for constructing, interpreting, and negotiating intercultural meanings. These conceptualisations may be the ones that are associated with their L1, or they may be others individuals have access to as result of living in a particular cultural environment, or even new ones developed from interacting with speakers from other cultures.

Several studies in recent years have shown that in certain contexts intercultural communication, and in particular miscommunication, reflect differences in the ways in which different groups of speakers conceptualise their experiences as they draw on their different cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors. Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009) observe that ‘cross-cultural variation at the conceptual level calls for a strongly meaning-oriented and interpretive approach to the study of intercultural communication’ and that is what Cultural Linguistics has to offer.

As an example of studies of intercultural communication from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, Sharifian (2010) explored miscommunication between speakers of Aboriginal English and non-Aboriginal English that mainly arose from non-Aboriginal speakers’ unfamiliarity with Aboriginal cultural spiritual conceptualisations. Many lexical items and linguistic expressions in Aboriginal English are associated with spiritual conceptualisations that characterise the Aboriginal worldview. These include words such as ‘sing’ and ‘smoke’. Take the following example from a conversation between a speaker of Aboriginal English and a non-Aboriginal English speaker:
A: My sister said, “when you go to that country, you are not allowed to let ‘em take your photo, they can sing you”.

According to the Aboriginal cultural schema of ‘singing’, ‘to sing someone’ is the ritual to cast a charm on someone with potential fatal consequences. For example, if a man falls in love with a girl he might try to obtain strands of her hair, her photo, or some such thing in order to ‘sing’ her. This would make the girl turn to him or in the case of her refusal to do so it may bring her a serious or even fatal illness (Luealla Eggington, pc). It is clear that unfamiliarity with the cultural conceptualisations that underlie the use of words such as ‘singing’ could well lead to miscommunication.

Another Aboriginal cultural schema associated with an English word in Aboriginal English is ‘medicine’ in the sense of ‘spiritual power’ (Arthur, 1996, p. 46). The following is an example of the use of the ‘medicine’ in this sense, from a conversation between the author of this chapter and an Aboriginal English speaker:

That when ... my mum was real crook and she ..., she said, ‘I woke up an’ it was still in my mouth ... the taste of all the medicine cause they come an’ give me some medicine last night’ an’ she always tells us that you can’t move ... an’ you wanna sing out an’ say just ... sorta try an’ relax. That happened to me lotta times I was about twelve.

In the above recount, the speaker remembers that once her mother was ill and that she mentioned the next morning that ‘they’ went to her and gave her some ‘medicine’ that she could still taste. She also describes her reaction to the ‘medicine’ as wanting to shout and then forcing oneself to relax. Without having the requisite schema, the audience of the above recount would be likely to think that ‘they’ refers to medical professionals who visited the mother after hours and gave her syrup or a tablet. However, further discussion with the speaker revealed that her mother was referring to ancestor beings using their healing power to treat her illness. It is clear from these examples how unfamiliarity with Aboriginal cultural schemas that inform Aboriginal English can lead to miscommunication.

Another example of cultural schemas underlying intercultural communication comes from Sharifian and Jamarani (2011). The study examined how the cultural schema, called sharmandegi ‘being ashamed’, can lead to miscommunication between Persian and non-Persian
speakers. This cultural schema is commonly instantiated in Persian through expressions such as sharmand-am (short for sharmandeh-am ‘ashamed-be.1SG’) meaning ‘I am ashamed’, or sharmandeh-am mikonin ‘ashamed-ISG do.2SG’ meaning ‘you make me ashamed’. Such expressions are usually used in association with several speech acts, such as expressions of gratitude, offering goods and services, requesting goods and services, apologising, accepting offers and making refusals. The following is an example of such usage, from a conversation between a student and a lecturer where the student is expressing gratitude to the lecturer for writing a recommendation letter for her:

Speaker A (the lecturer): in ham name-yi ke mikhâstin
   ‘Here is the letter that you asked for’

Speaker B (the student): sharmandeh-am, vâghean mamnoon
   ‘I am ashamed, I am really thankful’

Here the use of sharmandegi is intended as an expression of awareness that the other person has spent some time/energy in providing the speaker with goods and services they were under no obligation to supply. The speaker acknowledges this by uttering a ‘shame’ statement, as if guilty because of this awareness. Although the cultural schema of sharmandegi is very widespread and commonly drawn upon among speakers of Persian, it can lead to miscommunication during intercultural communication between speakers of Persian and non-Persian speakers. Consider the following example from Sharifian and Jamarani (2011):

Tara’s (Iranian) neighbour Lara (Australian) offered to do pick up some groceries for her, when she was doing her own shopping. Tara happily accepted the offer and told Lara what she needed. When Lara brought the groceries back, Tara wanted to pay her straight away:

Lara: It is okay, you can pay me later.
Tara: No, you have made me enough ashamed already.
Lara: But why do you say so?! I’d offered to do the shopping myself, and I had to do my own shopping anyway.

It is evident here that Lara is surprised to hear the expression, or accusation, of ‘shame’ on the part of Tara, as she had willingly offered to do the shopping for her. However, from the perspective of the Persian cultural schema of sharmandegi, Tara’s response is entirely appropriate,
simply reflecting Tara’s gratefulness to Lara. Examples such as this reveal how the process of intercultural communication involves a ‘meeting place’ for cultural conceptualisations, where successful communication entails the negotiation of intercultural meanings.

5.6 Cultural Linguistics and political discourse analysis

A number of recent studies in political discourse analysis have adopted the approaches of cognitive linguistics and Cultural Linguistics. In general, these studies have endorsed the long-standing observation that political discourse relies heavily on conceptual metaphor and that political metaphors are often rooted in certain underlying ideologies and cultural models (Dirven, Frank, and Ilie, 2001; Dirven, Frank, and Pütz, 2003). These conceptual devices are by no means incidental to political discourse but rather serve to establish or legitimise a given perspective (Sharifian and Jamarani, 2013).

George Bush, for example, repeatedly used either novel or conventional metaphors, in his speeches about the Iranian government’s nuclear technology. In one of his press conferences, Bush used the metaphorical expression of *house cleaning* in relation to Iran’s nuclear program and stated that *these people need to keep their house clean*. In this metaphor, nuclear technology is conceptualised as dirt, which needs to be removed from the house, the house here being the country. It is difficult to disagree with the statement that *one’s house needs to be kept clean* and the use of the *clean house* metaphor appears to present the US president in the legitimate position, of exhorting others to perform a socially desirable act. In other words, Bush’s statement positions Iran very negatively, as associated with *dirt* [dirty house], while positioning himself, or the US government, very positively, as moralising (in the positive sense of the word) and putting pressure on the Iranian government to *clean Iran’s house*. However, Iran construed its nuclear program not in the negative sense of ‘dirt’ but as ‘technology’ and ‘energy’, both of which have positive connotations.

From the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, political discourse is not free from cultural influence and is in fact heavily entrenched in cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian, 2007, 2009a). For example, when people attempt to translate from one language into another, such as for the purpose of international negotiation (see also Baker, 2006; Cohen, 1997; Hatim and Mason, 1990), they are very likely to need to render cultural conceptualisations associated with one language into cultural conceptualisations associated with the other. In other words, if languages encode
the largely culturally differentiated ways in which their speakers conceptualise their experiences, then the process of translation will make it hard to avoid rendering sets of words in ways that capture different conceptualisations of experience (see Avruch and Wang, 2005).

Sharifian (2007) analyses the cases of words such as ‘concession’ and ‘compromise’, which are pivotal to international political discourse, and argues that the meanings of these words lend themselves to certain culturally constructed conceptualisations. For example, the positive connotations of compromise, that is arriving at a settlement by making concessions hearken back to the secular foundations of Western democracies, linking to beliefs promulgated by 19th century classical liberalism, a view that elevated the status of the individual and promoted the notion of contractual relations between ‘free agents’ in commerce, and so on. This conceptualisation is far from a universal one, and some languages do even not have a word for this concept. Also, a historical analysis of the dictionary entries for this concept reveals a tendency towards attributing positive meanings to the concept rather than attributing more negative ones. In general, the approach of Cultural Linguistics can help unpack aspects of political discourse that largely draw on cultural conceptualisations. Given the importance of political discourse, and the possible consequences when misunderstandings arise, the contribution of Cultural Linguistics to this area of inquiry is undoubtedly very valuable.

5.7 Concluding remarks

One of the most important, and at the same time challenging, questions facing anthropological linguists has been the relationship between language, culture, and thought. Theoretical stances regarding this theme have ranged from a view that language shapes human thought and worldview to one that considers the three to be separate systems. Cultural Linguistics, with its multidisciplinary origin, engages with this theme by exploring features of human languages that encode culturally constructed conceptualisations of human experience. One of the basic premises in this line of inquiry is that language is a repository of cultural conceptualisations that have prevailed at different stages in the history of a speech community and these can leave traces in current linguistic practice. Also, while placing emphasis on the culturally constructed nature of conceptualisations, Cultural Linguistics shares with cognitive linguistics the view that meaning is conceptualisation. This chapter explains how Cultural Linguistics has thus far proved to
be both highly beneficial to and has benefited from, several areas of applied linguistics. Overall, due to the multidisciplinary nature of the analytical tools and theoretical frameworks that Cultural Linguistics draws upon, it has significant potential to continue to shed substantial light on the nature of the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisation.

Notes

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1. The reader is also referred to a discussion of the cultural basis of metaphors (see Quinn, 1991), where the cognitive anthropological perspective (i.e., metaphors reflect cultural models) challenges the traditional cognitive linguistic perspective (i.e., metaphors constitute cultural models).

2. The use of the plural in this example marks politeness/social distance.

References


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