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INTRODUCTION

Language, Culture, and Identity - Signs of Life

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The interrelationships between language, culture and identity are a major focus for many linguists, cognitive and cultural researchers.

Language has an inextricable connection with cultural identity and cultural practices, which in turn shapes personal identity. The nexus of language, culture and identity is explored in this book from diverse disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, offering a wealth of insights to a wide range of readers.

Background to this Volume

This book consists of selected peer-reviewed papers based upon presentations at the *7th International Conference on Language, Culture and Mind*, held at Hunan University in June 2016. The conference enhanced mutual understanding among researchers from different disciplines and yielded fruitful results in exploring the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisations. In this book, we have aimed to record the creativity, explanatory strength and depth of insights

that were demonstrated by the studies presented at the conference. The chapters were selected for this volume because they are based on case studies that reflect the development of interdisciplinary studies in exploring the relations among language, culture and identity. The ultimate goal of *Language, Culture, and Identity – Signs of Life* is to contribute to fostering a dialogue between different disciplines focused on the interaction of language and culture in individual and cultural identity construction. Additionally, it also provides the opportunity for both senior and early career international researchers to work together in a common platform, in order to disseminate high-quality research work and to establish effective and long-lasting interdisciplinary relationships.

Language, Culture, and Identity – Signs of Life

“Signs of Life” is an expression that is often used in the medical context, either in relation to the body or to an individual. It typically relates to purely biological signs that act as evidence of an organism being alive. However, our bodies are not “pure biology”, they are also social and cultural. It is through learning and using language that human beings become cultural as well as animate beings. Language is the cord that ties the individual to their community, and it is by means of language that human beings become fully immersed into their culture and active participants and constructors of its subsequent development. Language is the lifeblood of any community, and if a language dies, the cultural identity of the community and the individuals that compose it may be also threatened with extinction.

Linguistic signs contribute to mediating human cognition, and it is through language that cultural conceptualisations are brought to life and kept alive. Language is also a product of a shared cultural reality, in which each sign is not only a reflection of this reality, but also a resource for making meaning and creating the reality. For this reason, the present volume brings together contributions from different disciplines and perspectives that enhance our understanding of language, through its interaction with culture and identity in a diverse range of contexts and realities from around the globe.

Since language is always used in social and cultural context, it reflects people's socio-political values and world views. In Chapter 1, Linda Martín-Alcoff offers a philosophical account of how a Eurocentrist approach limits and biases the Western scholars' judgements and analyses of work in other traditions. The author points out that "Westerners are judging whether other traditions are worthy, but not putting themselves in the position to be taught" (p. 15). The author reflects on the pathological tendencies in Western understanding, that she calls the *transcendentalist delusion*. She argues that persisting in this ethnocentric way to explain the world means that scholars remain in an "ignorance that perpetuates the sort of epistemic injustices that came to be consolidated in many European intellectual trends during its extended efforts to colonise the globe" (p. 36).

These aspects of westerner's colonisation of the world are portrayed in narratives which emerge from different ways of identifying the context of postcolonial literature. Chapter 2 by Prem Poddar explores how Ghorka writing crystallises and problematizes postcolonial identities

in India. The narrative is always loaded with content or a sense of experience, and in this sense it is inseparable from its ideological content relative to lived experience. The author analyses Ghorka's narratives with a particular focus on cultural aspects, pointing out that the process of writing and translation are productive and transformative, rather than merely reflective, of culturally positioned subjectivity".

Colette Grinevald and Chris Sinha also explore in Chapter 3 how Eurocentrism is imported by researchers and scholars into their discussions and research practices. More precisely, the chapter exemplifies how the colonial Eurocentric bias is manifested in the research field of linguistics. The authors expose several examples of how this bias is inherent in the influential concept of the methods of endangered language documentation, addressing the unequal exchange that frequently characterises the relationship between researchers from the Global North, local researchers from Global South and members of the language communities studied. According to the authors, such relations are on occasions abusive, involving dominating North-South power relations in which linguists consider local, and especially native, researchers as mere "data collectors", that is, they are thought to only engage in mechanical activity, for which they do not need experience or knowledge.

Chapter 4, by Wary Kamaiurá Sabino, offers a first-person narrative of his journey as an indigenous student from a non-written culture to obtaining his PhD and now being a researcher of his own language and culture. In his text the author documents his personal experiences while an indigenous student and researcher of their own

language and culture. In his words: “Non-Indian people sometimes took advantage of me financially because I am an Indian, as they believe I was unable or unaware to keep track of their calculations” (p. 126). This narrative demonstrates that Grinevald and Sinha are not wrong in stating that the rules between researcher and researched need to be changed and, in particular, that “data collection” is a complex activity involving “knowledge as practice/practice as knowledge” (p. 84). The author affirms that it was from his experience as a native speaker, allied to the studies, that he obtained recognition and empowerment, becoming a recognised researcher of his culture and traditions. Aiming for a better knowledge of indigenous reality, this chapter reflects the richness within his society’s culture, also posing a reflexive discourse about his educational process and how intersecting cultural traditions influenced his viewpoint about the world.

Since language is always loaded with cultural signs, its practical use is inseparable from its meaning related to life. Exploring this idea, Chapter 5 by Stef Spronck brings up a discussion on the assumption that “if we conceive of linguistic signs as inherently social signs, we should be able to capture social meaning at the grammatical level of the linguistic sign itself, not only in its use” (p. 128). Based on the analysis of Ungarinyin language from Australia, the author proposes a grammatical approach by analysing differing semiotic modes, iconic, lexical and symbolic.

This discussion is complemented by Chapter 6, in which Yuanyuan He suggests that the development of critical cultural awareness (CCA)

involves a robust and dynamic assortment of framing-based cognitive processes. The author investigated these processes and stages in the development of critical cultural awareness on the basis of frame semantics and conceptual blending theory and proposes a model for CCA development to represent the different levels of our awareness of the impact of framing on our sociocultural understanding, as well as their relations. The study's findings suggest that more evidence-based research is needed to explore further effective prompts for these cognitive processes, and to investigate individuals' CCA development in actual social settings.

Chapters 7 and 8 both exemplify the potential of integrating a cognitive linguistic analysis for investigating metaphors used by Mandarin speakers from differing and interesting perspectives. Chapter 7 by Wei-Lun Lu analyses various signs of life in Taiwanese political eulogies at the linguistic, conceptual and social level. The author proposes that, in addition to conceptual metaphor and metonymy, cognitive grammar is also a useful theoretical construct in analysing political eulogies. Lu compared as well the eulogistic idioms that are displayed at Taiwanese politician's public funerals with Western eulogies, evidencing the variety of cultural conceptualizations and allusions that are involved and that the particular social role played by the deceased and the mourner also acts as an important sign in cultural-historical knowledge for the understanding of the political genre.

Similarly, in Chapter 8, Yanying Lu examines the inner self metaphors used by Chinese speakers during conversations. The author

argues that “speakers perceive and respond through performing various aspects of the self, literally and metaphorically” (p. 285) when participating in socio-culturally oriented practices. Thus, a socio-cognitive analytical approach would capture social meanings of inner self metaphors, as well as the interrelatedness of cognitive centrality and plurality of discursive performances. The author brings up insight in using a socio-cognitive approach to capture the socio-culturally embedded meanings of inner self metaphors in discursive acts.

Metaphors acquire a fundamental role in the daily use of all languages. For instance, in indigenous cosmogonies, the conceptualisation of human as the primordial form of the being generates several instances of personification and embodiment. Based on conceptual metaphor theory, Chapter 9 by Wany Sampaio, Vera da Silva Sinha and Chris Sinha focuses on metaphors of personification and body part constructions in Amondawa, a Tupian language of Brazil. The authors provide and analyse examples of the retelling of mythic narrative texts. These both reflect the cultural identity and cultural conceptualisations and illuminate cognitive processes. The authors relate their findings to the anthropological theory of Perspectivism and examine the relations between the speakers’ experience of the physical and mythical domains and their linguistic conceptualisations.

Chapter 10 by Penelope Scott discusses that not all metaphors grounded in sensory-motor experience will take similar forms cross-culturally. She proposes a semasiological approach for the analysis of *hefig* ‘heavy’ in Old English, situating the burden metaphor within a network of

cultural metaphors and culturally-specific proposition-schemas. It is argued that although the conceptual metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE BURDENS might be grounded in sensory-motor experience, the various weight-related metaphors arising in certain domains —such as discipline or religion— cannot be explained without accounting for their cultural conceptualizations.

Chapter 11 by Ming-Ming Pu and Qinghong Pu investigates constraints and motivations underlying the narrative process by analysing narratives elicited from the same stimulus material by native speakers of American English and Mandarin Chinese. It is demonstrated that “narrative as a complex process is motivated and governed by the cognition-culture-language interaction” (p. 363). The authors’ analysis evaluates narrative styles with native English speakers and native Chinese speakers, highlighting the objectivity of English narrative in contrast with more evaluative narratives produced by Chinese speakers that make more use of emotional and personal involvement when narrating an event.

Narratives fall into various types and serve different functions. Narrative in rhetorical discourse is a special type in that it renders analytical and evaluative readings of narratives and narrative elements in situated discourse. Its aim is usually to persuade or convince people towards specific ends. In Chapter 12, Mingjian Xiang and Bosen Ma explore the cognitive underpinnings of rhetoric by presenting a case study of the rhetorical use of fictive questions in the *Zhuangzi* text. The analysis employs a framework featuring a combination of the theory of conceptual integration or ‘blending’ and the theory of fictive interaction. The authors’

argued that the ubiquitous use of conversational structures as rhetorical strategies in ancient texts across languages and cultures emerge from our intrinsically conversational mind as interacting social beings.

Zooming out from the narrative itself, we could find that tracing specific notions in public discourse is conducive to a deeper understanding of political practices from a cultural perspective. Chapter 13 by Xuefei Ma takes her data from the use in the *People's Daily* of the two contrasting terms *nüxing* and *funü* in conceptualisations of women in the discourse of “keeping up with the times”. Although these are often considered synonymous words for “woman”, the analysis reveals that *nüxing* is primarily used in representations of modernity, while *funü* is associated with notions of the lesser, the lacking and the inferior in the contemporary context. The different conceptions of these two terms demonstrate on the one hand how women are categorised as part of the nation, and on the other hand the structure of power within China's political system.

Approaching relations among language, culture and cognition from another angle, Chapter 14 by Yahong Xue investigates the representation, cognitive motivation and cultural connotation of Chinese non-basic colour terms and demonstrates that they are intimately related to both language associations and perceptual learning specific to Chinese culture. It is found that metaphor, metonymy and conceptual integration are the major cognitive motivations and the use of cultural-specific terms to capture fine distinctions of colour reveals the unique thinking mode of the Chinese. The chapter lends important cross-cultural support to contemporary neo-Whorfian research.

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