

## From Cognitive Linguistics to Cultural Linguistics

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### Which comes first, culture or language?

- Language and culture are inseparable
  - But treated as distinct by scholars
- Cognitive Linguistics can bridge this gap
  - linguistic phenomena as artifacts of human experience
  - how human beings conceive of, manipulate, and metaphorically extend meaning

## Overview

- What is Cultural Linguistics?
- What can Cognitive Linguistics contribute to Cultural Linguistics?
- Case Studies in Cultural Linguistics
- Conclusion

## What is Cultural Linguistics?

- Relationship between language and cultural identity
- How cultural concepts are embedded in language
- What goes into an utterance
- The parameters a speaker must attend to
- “Thinking for speaking”



### Relationship between language and cultural identity

- Language is the vehicle for nearly every type of cultural expression
  - Culture with “C”: prose, poetry, theater, ritual
  - Culture with “c”: jokes, sayings, songs
  - Transmission of “wordless” media: music, dance, food, costume, handicrafts
- Most important factor in group identity
- Vast majority of minority groups are losing their languages today

### How cultural concepts are embedded in language

- Lexical characteristics
  - Nomenclature for ecological niches
  - Language-specific lexemes, cf. Cz *mlsat*, Norw *å slurve*
- Grammatical characteristics
  - E.g., syntactic constructions, verb inflections
  - Often overlooked and difficult to compare
  - Dictate how content is organized and presented
  - Systematic, therefore potentially greater impact



## What goes into an utterance



- Prisms through which information passes before an utterance is pronounced
  - Sensory perception organs
  - Conceptual process
  - Construal, mental states, imagined scenes, hypotheses, pragmatic intentions

## The parameters a speaker must attend to

- Many possible linguistic outputs for the same input and speaker
- Choice of options are presented by grammar
- Largely unconscious, yet pervasive, involving hundreds of distinctions in a given language
- Connect to essential concepts such as human relations and time/event structure
- Differ widely across languages
  - E.g., gender, number, verb-framed vs. satellite-framed, temporal location

## “Thinking for speaking”

- Symbiotic relationship between language and culture
- Grammatical structure as a cultural norm
- Co-evolution and co-influence, not unidirectional determinism
- Distinctive patterns of “Thinking for speaking” (Slobin 1987)
- Every language meets expressive needs of its community, but equality does not mean interchangeability
- One can’t just take the contents of one culture and express them in another language

## What can Cognitive Linguistics contribute to Cultural Linguistics?

- Relevant attributes of Cognitive Linguistics
  - Recognition of meaning as inherent to all linguistic structures
  - Grounding of meaning in human experience and extension of meaning via metaphor
  - Integration of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition
  - Absence of a presumed set of “language universals”
- Summary of what Cognitive Linguistics can contribute

## Recognition of meaning as inherent to all linguistic structures

- Cognitive Linguistics does not insist on autonomous “modes” such as lexicon vs. syntax
- All units and structures are meaningful – this includes grammar, not just lexicon
- Use of a particular linguistic category is thus meaningful
- Therefore grammar is relevant to culture

## Grounding of meaning in human experience and extension of meaning via metaphor

- There are many experiences all human beings share
  - E.g., gravity gives us UP vs. DOWN
  - Most languages extend this distinction metaphorically, but different languages do so in different ways, cf. Cz *nad očekáváníí, nad mé chápání* vs. Eng *beyond expectation, beyond me*
- Every language has a unique metaphorical profile, and this profile has cultural significance

### Integration of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition

- Linguistic categories behave the same way as all other human cognitive categories
  - per-/conceptual category for color blue is subject to same cognitive constraints as lexeme *blue*, and “extralinguistic” knowledge is part of the same package
  - The meaning of a concept like *blue* differs across cultures
  - Key words (and grammatical structures) can shed light on the world-view of a given language community (Zaliznjak, Levontina & Šmelev 2005)

### Absence of a presumed set of “language universals”

- Lack of a priori assumptions about specific universals makes Cognitive Linguistics well-suited for exploration of diversity, both linguistic and cultural
- Supports investigation of inherent values of distinctions made in different languages, rather than just calculating overlap and “distance”
  - E.g., Germanic & Slavic languages organize physical location around concepts of containment and supporting surfaces (*in* vs. *on*), but Korean focuses on tight vs. loose fit (*kkita* vs. *nehta*; Bowerman & Choi 2003)

### Summary of what Cognitive Linguistics can contribute

- If:
  - Meaning plays a role in all linguistic phenomena
  - Grammar is connected to culture via shared content
- Then:
  - Grammar is part of the semiotic endeavor of projecting values and identity

### Summary of what Cognitive Linguistics can contribute, cont'd

- Both language and culture use metaphor to elaborate their content
- Inclusion of “extralinguistic” knowledge in linguistic categories integrates language and culture
- Encourages focus on language-specific values and their culture-specific parallels

### Case Studies in Cultural Linguistics

Two sets of case studies  
1) Human relations  
2) Time and event structure  
Based on research on Czech, Russian, Polish, and English  
Different languages show different patterns of directing attention  
Cultural implications are subtle, but systematic

### Human relations

- Four studies
- Virility
  - Domination
  - BE vs. HAVE
  - Self-indulgence

## Virility

- Male human beings vs. everything else
- All Slavic languages (except Slovene) can express virility grammatically: special numerals, inflectional endings, syntactic constructions (Janda 1997, 1999, 2000)
- Most robust in Polish – see data on handout



## Virility, cont'd.

- ICM of Polish male at top end of virility scale
- Does NOT mean that Polish language and culture are more discriminatory
- Possible cultural correlates:
  - Poland is most ethnically homogeneous state in EU (2006 CIA World Fact Book)
  - Poles are very concerned about “purity” of Polish (Dybiec 2003)
  - Chivalry still highly prized in Poland

## Domination

- Russian & Czech inherited same grammatical case system from Proto-Slavic
- Case government of verbs expressing domination differs (Janda & Clancy 2002, 2006)
- See data on handout



## Domination, cont'd.

- For verbs expressing domination,
  - Russian uses the Instrumental case, stressing that human beings under domination are used like tools
  - Czech uses the Dative case, stressing the human capacity of dominated people
- Maybe just coincidence
- Possible cultural correlates: historical reality – Russians have often dominated, Czechs have often been dominated

## BE vs. HAVE

- Russian is a BE language:
    - *U menja byla mašina*
    - Only one modal verb, *moč'* ‘be able’
    - Many impersonal constructions with logical subject in Dative case
  - Czech is a HAVE language:
    - *Měla jsem auto*
    - Plenty of modal verbs
    - Less use of impersonal constructions
- (Janda & Clancy 2002, Janda forthcoming a)

## BE vs. HAVE, cont'd.

- Russian is a language where things happen to people
- Czech is a language where many of the same experiences are things people do
- Possible cultural correlates:
  - Russian fatalism is a famous phenomenon (Nietzsche 1888 to Guelassimov 2006)
  - There is no corresponding “Czech fatalism”

## Self-indulgence

- Czech preserved the Proto-Slavic short form Dative clitic reflexive pronoun *si* 'for oneself'
  - this form was lost in many neighboring languages (Russian, Polish), but behaves somewhat similarly in Slovak
- Czech has used *si* to develop a wide range of expressions of self-indulgence – See data on handout (Janda 2004a and Janda & Clancy 2002)

## Self-indulgence, cont'd.

- Czech makes large and consistent investment in emphatic expression of benefit to the self
- Possible cultural correlates:
  - me-first self-indulgence of Švejk
  - Jára D. Cimrman's "inventions"
  - Dubček's "Communism with a human face"
  - Contrast with Russian communism which was more focused on collective than individual needs



## Time and event structure

- Slavic aspect system uses TIME IS SPACE metaphor, but shows variation (Janda 2002a, 2002b, 2004b, 2006; Mehlig 1994, 2003)
- Perfective conceived of as a discrete solid object (Russian): *Pisatel' napisal roman*
- Imperfective conceived of as a fluid substance (Russian): *Pisateli pišut romany*

## Time and event structure, cont'd.

- In Slavic aspect is primary, tense is secondary
- In Slavic Perfective is marked; in other languages with this distinction, Imperfective is marked
- Russian uses more Imperfective than other Slavic languages (cf. historical present, general-factual, polite imperatives, annulled reversible actions)
- Russian also uses more singular-only mass nouns for items like *kartofel* 'potatoes', *kljukva* 'cranberries', and *izjum* 'raisins'
- Possible cultural correlates: Size boundary for individuation is higher in Russian, might correlate to focus on individual vs. collective

## Conclusion

- Some linguistic differences are probably not culturally relevant (cf. Polish *Idę do mamy* vs. Russian *Ja idu k mame*/Czech *Jdu k mámě* 'I am going to my mother')
- There are counterexamples (cf. Russian uses more Perfectives in narrations of sequenced events)
- But language and culture might be congruent in many ways
- Use of Cognitive Linguistics to examine cultural linguistic phenomena is a new line of research, relevant to the identities of thousands of speech communities on Earth