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 has the potential to bridge this gap (Palmer 1996, Achard & Kemmer 2004)
  - linguistic phenomena as artifacts of human experience
  - how human beings conceive of, manipulate, and metaphorically extend meaning
Overview

1. What is Cultural Linguistics?
2. What can Cognitive Linguistics contribute to Cultural Linguistics?
3. Case Studies in Cultural Linguistics
4. Conclusion
1. What is Cultural Linguistics?
   a. Relationship between language and cultural identity
   b. How cultural concepts are embedded in language
   c. What goes into an utterance
   d. The parameters a speaker must attend to
   e. “Thinking for speaking”
   f. Grammar as a cultural construct in context
1a. 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
1b. 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

• Lexicon and Grammar are cultural constructs
1c. 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
1d. 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
1e. “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
1f. Grammar as a cultural construct in context

- To what extent are grammatical and cultural patterns consistent?
- Are there connections between what grammars highlight and what cultures highlight?
  - E.g. honorifics and respect for social hierarchy
2. What can Cognitive Linguistics contribute to Cultural Linguistics?

a. Recognition of meaning as inherent to all linguistic structures
b. Grounding of meaning in human experience and extension of meaning via metaphor
c. Integration of linguistic and non-linguistic cognition
d. Absence of a presumed set of “language universals”
2a. 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
2b. Grounding of meaning in human experience and extension 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 očekávání, nad mé chápání* vs. Eng *beyond expectation, beyond me*; Chinese “vertical time”

- Every language has a unique metaphorical profile, and this profile has cultural significance
2c. 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)
2d. 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)
2. 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
2. Summary of what Cognitive Linguistics can contribute

- 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.
3. Case Studies in Cultural Linguistics

Case studies of
a. Gender
b. Inst vs. Dat case
c. BE vs. HAVE
d. Dative reflexive clitic
e. Singular vs. plural
f. Source–location–goal

Based on research on Czech, Russian, Polish, Norwegian, and Sámi

Different languages show different patterns of directing attention

There may be cultural correlations
3a. Gender

- 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
3a. Gender

• ICM places male human at top end of 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
3a. Gender

Julia Kuznetsova – grammatical profiling of Russian verbs

- Russian marks gender of subject on singular past tense forms of verbs: masculine, feminine, or neuter
- Data: Russian National Corpus (>140M words) – 8,340 verbs with more than 20 past tense forms
- fem:masc ratio for all verbs, ranging from zero to infinity
- Peak is at 0.3 – typical Russian verb has 3x as many masculine as feminine forms
3a. Gender

(See data sample on handout)

• Top 100 Masculine verbs in Russian:
  - leadership, professions, drinking, smoking, aggressive sex, argumentation, evaluation, cutting, hammering, liturgical and high style domains

• Top 100 Feminine verbs in Russian:
  - maternity, child-rearing, needlecrafts, cooking, washing, crying, exclaiming, lamentation, relationships with men, moving and speaking like a bird
3b. Instrumental vs. Dative case

- 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
3b. Instrumental vs. Dative case

- 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
3c. BE vs. HAVE

- Russian is a BE language:
  - *U menja mašina* [By me (is) car]
  - Only one modal verb, *moč’* ‘be able’
  - Many impersonal constructions with logical subject in Dative case

- Czech is a HAVE language:
  - *Mám auto* [(I) have car]
  - Plenty of modal verbs
  - Less use of impersonal constructions
3c. BE vs. HAVE

- 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 (Nietsche 1888 to Guelassimov 2006)
  - There is no corresponding “Czech fatalism”
3c. BE vs. HAVE

• **BUT:**
  - Sámi is also a BE language (like Russian):
  - *Mus lea biila* [Me–LOC is car]
  - Sámi has even more modal verbs than Czech
  - ...and even fewer impersonal expressions
3d. Dative reflexive clitic

- Czech preserved the Proto–Slavic short form Dative reflexive clitic 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
3d. Dative reflexive clitic

- 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
Both Russian and Czech use singular for masses, plural for countable objects.

Russian has a higher threshold for the transition between count and mass, accepts rather large objects as masses; Czech treats many of these as singular masses (See data on handout).
3e. Singular vs. Plural

- The count vs. mass distinction for nouns in Slavic has a parallel in verbal aspect
- Perfective conceived of as a countable solid object (Russian): Pisatel’ napisal roman ‘A writer wrote [perfective] a novel’
- Imperfective conceived of as a mass (Russian): Pisateli pišut romany ‘Writers write [imperfective] novels’
3e. Singular vs. Plural

- Russian uses more Imperfective than Czech (cf. historical present, general-factual, polite imperatives, annulled reversible actions), parallel to use of 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
3e. Singular vs. Plural

- In Sámi, sg vs. plural does not correspond to count vs. mass, but instead both sg and plural are used for masses
  - **sg** designates masses that are wet/hold together *gáffe* ‘coffee (cooked, drinkable)’, *deadja* ‘tea (cooked, drinkable)’
  - **pl** designates particulate masses that don’t hold together *gáfet* ‘coffee (dry beans)’, *deajat* ‘coffee (dry leaves)’, *jáfut* ‘flour’
3f. Source–location–goal

- Norwegian uses three different ways to express source, location, goal
- Russian uses the same preposition to express both location and goal
  - A location is a place you go to
- Sámi uses the same case to express both source and location
  - A location is a place you come from

See data on handout
3f. Source–location–goal

• Possible cultural correlates
  – Sámi has traditionally a nomadic culture, Russian is not
  – Sámi has a very complex kinship system, strong reference to where one comes from
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