Cultural Linguistics: The Development of a Multidisciplinary Paradigm

Farzad Sharifian
Monash University, Australia

Abstract

Cultural Linguistics is a multidisciplinary area of research that explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisations. It offers both a theoretical framework and an analytical framework for examining features of languages that are entrenched in cultural conceptualisations, including cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural metaphors. In recent years, Cultural Linguistics has drawn on several disciplines and sub-disciplines, such as complexity science and distributed cognition, to enrich its theoretical basis, particularly 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 paper elaborates on these observations and provides illustrative examples of linguistic research from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics.

Keywords: cultural linguistics, cultural conceptualisations, language and culture

1. Introduction

As a sub-discipline of linguistics with a multidisciplinary origin, Cultural Linguistics focuses on the interface between language and cultural conceptualisations (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011). Cultural Linguistics explores, in explicit terms, conceptualisations that have a cultural basis and are encoded in and communicated through features of human languages. While Cultural Linguistics shares its pivotal focus on *meaning as conceptualisation* with cognitive linguistics, its emphasis is upon analysing conceptualisations that have their root in the cultural experiences of speakers.

The term ‘cultural linguistics’ was perhaps first used by one of the founders of the

field of cognitive linguistics, Ronald Langacker, in a statement he made, emphasising 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). He further maintained (2014, p. 27) that "while meaning is identified as conceptualization, cognition at all levels is both embodied and culturally embedded". In practice, however, the role of culture in shaping the conceptual level of language and the influence of culture as a system of conceptualisation 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 was 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.

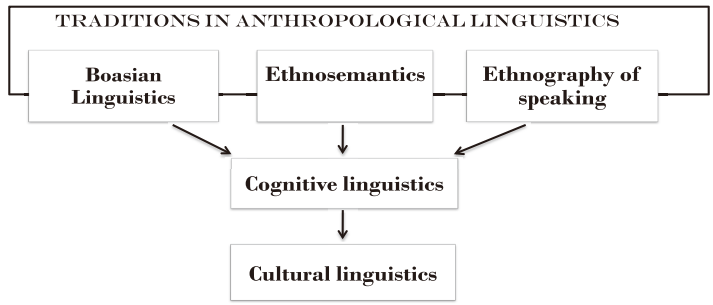
Palmer's notion of imagery is not limited to visual imagery. As he puts it, " [i]magery is what we see in our mind's eye, but it is also the taste of mango, the feel of walking in a tropical downpour, the music of *Mississippi Masala*" (Palmer, 1996, p. 3). He adds, "phonemes are heard as verbal images 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). As Palmer elaborates on his notion of imagery, it becomes plain that it captures conceptual units such as cognitive categories and schemas, while my terminological preference is the term *conceptualisation* rather than imagery. I will elaborate on my use of this term later in this paper.

Palmer noted that his proposal applied three traditional approaches from anthropological linguistics to 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).

His proposal is diagrammatically represented in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. A diagrammatic representation of Palmer's (1996) proposal for Cultural Linguistics



Boasian linguistics, named after the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, understood language as reflecting people's mental life and culture (see Leavitt, 2015a). Boas observed that different languages classify experiences differently and that these linguistic categories tend to influence the thought patterns of their speakers (Blount, 1974/1995, 2011; 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 simplistically attributed to Sapir and Whorf, in recent decades much more sophisticated and nuanced accounts of the views held by these two researchers have been presented (see Leavitt, 2015a).

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; see also Leavitt, 2015b). For example, several ethnosemanticists have extensively studied kinship classifications in the 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 (Kronenfeld, 2015; Tonkinson, 1998). An important and focused field of inquiry, closely related to ethnosemantics, is ethnobiology which is the study of how plants and animals are treated and used across different cultures (Berlin, 1992).

The ethnography of speaking, or the ethnography of communication, which is 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, and communication in general. Hymes emphasized 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 grammatical competence Chomskyan linguists had proposed. He proposed that a discussion of these factors should be placed under the rubric of *communicative competence*, a category which includes competence in 'appropriate' norms of language use in various socio-cultural contexts. Although a number of anthropological linguists

have simply focused on documenting, describing, and classifying lesser known languages (see Duranti, 2003 for a historical review), the three linguistic-anthropological traditions discussed so far generally "share an interest in the native's point of view" (Palmer, 1996, p. 26) as well as the above mentioned interest in the socio-cultural grounding of language.

Turning to cognitive linguistics, it utilises several analytical tools drawn from the broad field of cognitive science, notably the notion of 'schema'. This concept has been very widely used in several disciplines and under different rubrics, which has led to different understandings and definitions. 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 & Norman, 1975; Minsky, 1975; Rumelhart, 1980). Image schemas, on the other hand, are regarded as recurring cognitive structures which establish and organise patterns of understanding and reasoning, often elaborated by extension from 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 & 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, in the context of analysis of cases from such diverse languages as Tagalog, Coeur d'Alene, and Shona (for example, Palmer 1996, 2003), Palmer persuasively argued that all these conceptual structures most probably have a cultural basis[1].

Although Palmer believed that the link with cognitive linguistics could provide Cultural Linguistics with a solid cognitive perspective, his proposal received criticism for *not* having a strong cognitive base, specifically, in the areas of cognitive representations, structure, and processes (for example, Peeters, 2001). The basis of that criticism, however, appears to have arisen from the fact that there are different interpretations of the term 'cognitive'. Whereas studies of cognitive processing in the subfield of psycholinguistics mostly focus on non-conceptual phenomena, such as response time and strength of response, it is their emphasis on *cognitive conceptualisation* that makes studies associated with mainstream cognitive linguistics 'cognitive'.

In recent years, to afford an integrated understanding of the notions of 'cognition' and 'culture', as they relate to language, Cultural Linguistics has drawn on several other disciplines and sub-disciplines for its theoretical framework. This framework can be best described as *cultural cognition and language* (Sharifian, 2008b, 2009b, 2011) in that it

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 speech community. Several cognitive scientists have moved beyond the level of the individual, to work on cognition as a collective entity (for example, Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Sutton, 2005, 2006; Wilson, 2005). Other scholars, 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 other 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, I offer (2008b, 2009b, 2011) 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 speech community 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 cognitive systems of the individual members). Like all emergent systems, cultural cognition is *dynamic*. On the one hand, it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated within and across the generations of the relevant speech community, and on the other it changes in response to the contact that members of that group have with other languages and cultures.

Language is a central aspect of cultural cognition as it serves, to use wa Thiong'o's (1986) term, a 'collective memory bank' reflecting 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 that remain in current linguistic practice, some of which are fossilized 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 fluid vehicle and a memory bank for the (re-)transmission of cultural cognition and its component parts or *cultural conceptualisations*, a term that will be elaborated upon later in this paper.

2. Why Cultural Linguistics?

A question might be asked in relation to the need for the development of Cultural Linguistics. Scholars who have been interested in exploring the interrelationship between language and culture have faced at least two significant challenges in regards to the

notion of 'culture': one is its abstractness and the other, the essentialist and reductionist implications often associated with it. These challenges have led to the avoidance of the term by many scholars. For example, as Atkinson (2015, p. 424) puts it, "[i]n the very field which innovated the concept in fact—anthropology—culture has been 'half-abandoned'". Many scholars have found the notion of 'culture' too abstract to be useful in explicating the relationships that link beliefs and behaviour to language use. Although linguists have had rigorous analytical tools at their disposal, what they have lacked is an analytical framework for breaking down cultures and examining their components, so that features of human languages could be explored in terms of the relationship between language and culture. Cultural Linguistics, and in particular the theoretical framework of cultural cognition and cultural conceptualisations, is an attempt to provide such an analytical framework.

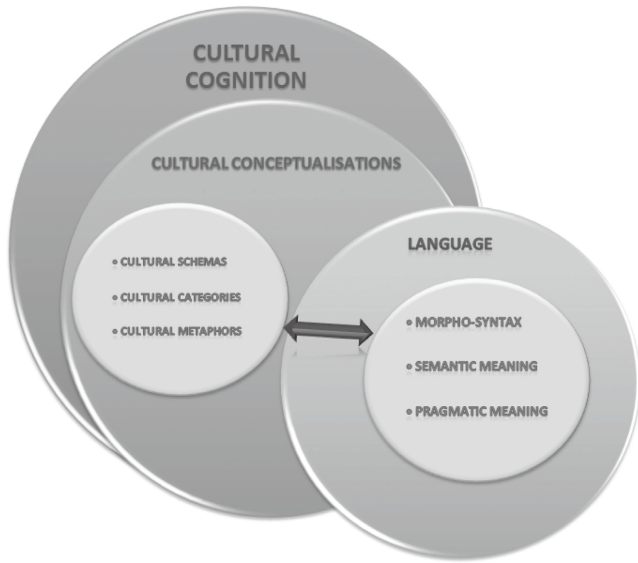
First of all, this framework avoids the abstractness of the notion of 'culture' and instead focuses on exploring culturally constructed *conceptualisations* which draw on the disciplines outlined above, for its analytical tools, such as 'cultural schemas', 'cultural categories', and 'cultural metaphors'. These analytical tools allow cultural conceptualisations to be examined systematically and rigorously. Furthermore, they enable the analysis of features of human languages in relation to the cultural conceptualisations in which they are entrenched.

As for the essentialist and reductionist tendencies associated with the notion of 'culture', the theoretical model of cultural cognition and cultural conceptualisations avoids these by, first of all, examining cultural conceptualisations rather than examining speakers and then ascribing cultures to people, or people to cultures. It also views cultural conceptualisations as *heterogeneously distributed* across the members of a group, rather than equally shared by the speakers. Both language and cultural conceptualisations demonstrate a similar pattern of distribution across speech communities, and neither of them is homogenously held by speakers. These themes will be further expanded in the remainder of this paper.

3. Cultural Conceptualisations

Among the analytical tools that have proved particularly 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 paper, these analytical tools are seen as applicable to the collective or macro level of cultural cognition, as well as that of the individual or micro level (Frank & Gontier, 2011). Cultural conceptualisations and their entrenchment in language are intrinsic to cultural cognition. This formulation of the model of cultural cognition, cultural conceptualisations and language may be summarized diagrammatically as follows:

Figure 2. Model of cultural cognition, cultural conceptualisations, and language.



The above diagram captures the close relationship between language, cultural conceptualisations, and cultural cognition. As reflected in the diagram, various features and levels of language, from morpho-syntactic features to pragmatic and semantic meanings, may be embedded in cultural conceptualisations in the form of cultural schemas, cultural categories and cultural metaphors. The following section elaborates on the interrelationship between language and each of these types of cultural conceptualisations.

3.1 Cultural schemas and language

Since the notions of schema and conceptual metaphor were discussed earlier in this paper, the following section elaborates further on the notion of 'cultural schema' and discusses how it relates to language. Cultural schemas are a culturally constructed sub-class of schemas; that is, they are generated by being abstracted from the collective cognitions associated with a speech community, and therefore to some extent based on shared experiences, common to the group, as opposed to being generated directly from an individual's idiosyncratic experiences. They enable individuals to communicate meanings that have their roots in the cultural experiences of speakers. In terms of their development and their representation, at the macro level, cultural schemas emerge from interactions between the members of a speech community, while they are constantly negotiated and renegotiated across time and space. At the micro level, over time each individual acquires and internalizes these macro-level schemas, albeit in a heterogeneously distributed fashion. That is, individuals who belong to the same speech community 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 3:

Figure 3. Diagrammatic representation of a cultural schema (adapted from Sharifian, 2011)

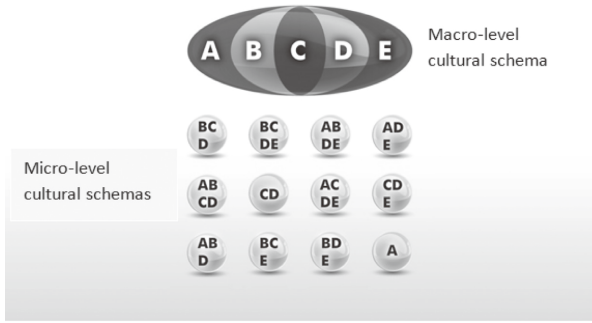


Figure 3 shows how a cultural schema may be represented in a heterogeneously distributed fashion across the minds of individuals. It schematically represents how members may have internalised some, but not all, components of a macro-level cultural schema. It also shows how individuals may share some, 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 speech community. 'Outsiders' who have somehow had contact and interaction with the group can also internalise aspects of their 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 & Quinn, 1997; see also Strauss, 2015). For cognitive anthropologists, culture is a cognitive system, and thus the notion of 'cultural schema' provides a useful tool for exploring cognitive schemas that are culturally constructed and maintained across different societies and speech communities. 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 & Strauss, 1992; Holland & 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 inter-subjectively 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, which is 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 and encoded in many lexical items of human languages.

It is easier to grasp the complex and culturally specific nature of cultural schema by taking an example of a powerful organising concept not found in English. An example of this would be the much discussed Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which is often translated into English as 'relation', 'relationship', 'connection', and 'networking'. Many scholars have noticed the absence of the exact equivalent of the concept of *guanxi* in English, and have offered various descriptions and definitions for it (e.g., Luo, 2007; Farh et al, 1998). From the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, *guanxi* is a cultural schema that relates to the complex dynamics of a particular type of interpersonal relationship in China. Luo (2007, p. 2) explains *guanxi* as follows:

> The Chinese word "guanxi" refers to the concept of drawing on connections in order to secure favors in personal relations. It forms an intricate, pervasive relational network which the Chinese cultivate energetically, subtly, and imaginatively. It contains mutual obligations, assurances, and understanding, and governs Chinese attitudes towards long-term social and business relations.

Guanxi underlies many other concepts in Chinese and is closely interwoven with many other cultural schemas, such as the Chinese cultural schema of *mianzi* 'face' (see Lee, Pae, & Wong, 2001). Lee, Pae, and Wong (2001, p. 55), for instance, maintain that "the underlying motives for reciprocal behaviours in guanxi is face saving". For a better knowledge of the cultural schema of *guanxi*, further research is needed to explore its instantiations in Chinese English.

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 by both parties 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. Thus, inferences 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 bases for a significant portion of meanings in human languages.

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 (see Polzenhagen & Xia, 2015). It begins, albeit in an idiosyncratic way, early in life. Many studies have investigated how small children engage in categorising objects and events (Mareschal, Powell & Volein, 2003). They 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:

> Categorization research focuses on the acquisition and use of categories shared by a culture and associated with language—what we will call 'cultural categorization'. 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 distinct. 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.

An example of a cultural category from Chinese is 压岁钱, or what is referred to in English as the 'lucky money', which refers to paper money that is placed inside red envelopes and given as gifts, particularly to children, during social and family occasions around the New Year[2]. The envelope is red, a colour symbolising luck in Chinese culture which is also associated with fire as one of the traditional Five Elements which act as organising categories in Chinese culture. In this capacity, red is believed to repel evil. There are further cultural elements implicit in the gift of red envelopes. For example, the amount of money in the envelope should be dividable by two, because odd digits are associated with funerals. Sometimes the lucky money and the red envelope are used metaphorically to refer to a bribe, associated with the underlying conceptualisation of A BRIBE IS A GIFT (Cummings & Wolf, 2011).

As for the relationship between cultural categories and language, many lexical items 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'. Even where foods are shared by two different cultures, the way they are categorised—for example the instances of different varieties of pasta—may be different or assumed to be common knowledge in one culture but specialised knowledge in another.

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 (Walsh, 1993; Street, 1987). 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 memberships in the sense that, depending on its function in a specific instance, 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 turn 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, by 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).

3.3 Cultural metaphors and language

As mentioned earlier, conceptual metaphor refers to the cognitive conceptualisation of one domain in terms of another (for example, Lakoff & 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 (see Yu, 2012). This is reflected in expressions such as 'buying time', 'saving time', and the like. More importantly, our understanding of ourselves is achieved through conceptual metaphors. For example, we can conceptualise our thoughts, feelings, personality traits, and so on in terms of our body parts (see Yu, 2015).

Research in Cultural Linguistics is interested in exploring conceptual metaphors that are culturally constructed (for example, Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2011; see also Yu, 2009a, 2009b, 2012), which I refer to as *cultural metaphors*. Several studies have explored cultural schemas and models that give rise to conceptual 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 practiced in ancient Indonesia. In some languages, such as Tok Pisin (Muhlhausler, Dutton & Romaine, 2003), the belly is the seat of emotions. Yu (2009b) observes that many linguistic expressions in Chinese reflect the conceptualisation of the heart is the ruler of the body. He maintains that the 'target-domain concept here is an important one because the heart organ is regarded as the central faculty of cognition and the site of both affective and cognitive activities in ancient Chinese philosophy (Yu, 2007, p. 27). Studies of such cultural conceptualisations are currently gathering further momentum (for example, Idström & Piirainen, 2012).

It should be noted here that the cognitive processing of conceptual metaphor is a rather 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' conceptualisations 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 the cultural roots of the expressions, or are engaged in any conceptual mapping when they use them. In such cases, the conceptual metaphors may serve rather as cultural schemas which guides thinking about and helps with understanding certain 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 heavily rely 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.

4. Applied Cultural Linguistics

While the ultimate aim of Cultural Linguistics is to examine the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisations, a Cultural Linguistics perspective has already been used in several areas of applied linguistics. The following sections present brief summaries of how a Cultural Linguistics framework has been applied to World Englishes, intercultural communication, and political discourse analysis.

4.1 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 when their respective cultural conceptualisations are taken into consideration (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.

Other researchers (Polzenhagen & Wolf, 2007; Wolf, 2008; Wolf & 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, e.g., "they took bribes from their less fortunate brothers", Wolf observes that the central conceptual metaphors in that variety of English are kinship is community and community is kinship (Wolf, 2008, p. 370).

I (2005, 2008a) examined cultural conceptualisations in the 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 association, however, he found that English words such as 'family', 'home', and 'shame' evoked cultural conceptualisations in these students that were predominantly those 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 the 'nuclear' family, which is the central notion in Anglo-Australian culture. Consider the following table of data from Sharifian (2005):

Table 1. A comparison of Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian meanings for 'family'

Aboriginal	***Anglo-Australian***
Stimulus word: Family	***Stimulus word: Family***
• *Love your pop, love your nan, love our mums, love our dads.* • *Brothers, sisters, aunie, uncles, nan, pops, father, nephew and nieces.* • *They're there for you, when you need 'm they look after you, you call 'm aunie and uncle and cousins.* • *People, mums, dads, brother, group of families, like aunties and uncles nanas and pops.* • *I've got lots of people in my family, got a big family, got lots of family.* • *My family, you know how many family I got? One thousand millions, hundred ninety-nine million thousand thousand nine nine sixty-one ... million million, uncle, Joe, Stacy, ... cousins, uncles, sisters, brothers, girlfriends and my million sixty-one thousand family* • *I like my family, all of my family, my aunties an' uncles and cousins, and I like Dryandra.* • *Just having family that is Nyungar* [an Aboriginal cultural group] *and meeting each other*	• *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.* • *Dad, mum, brother, dog.* • *Mum, and dad, brother and sister.* • *Fathers, sisters, parents, caring.* • *People, your mum and dad, and your sister and brother.* • *All my family, my brothers and sisters, my mum and my dad.* • *Kids, mums, dads, sisters, brothers.* • *Mother, sister, brother, life.* • *Mum, dad, my brother.* • *I think of all the people in my family [F: Who are they? I: My mum, my dad, an my sister]* • *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.*

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. Moreover, for them 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. Research on the conceptual basis of Aboriginal English has significant implications for the education of Aboriginal English speaking students. Conceptual differences between Aboriginal English and Australian English have disadvantaged Aboriginal English speaking students, due to frequent cases of miscommunication between these students and their non-Aboriginal teachers (e.g., Sharifian, Rochecouste, & Malcolm, 2004).

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. 163–164).

This is a ground breaking approach to the way dictionary entries are compiled for it allows readers to become familiar with the cultural conceptualisations underlying certain expressions in the given language or the language variety. But, of course, in many cases the underlying conceptualisations themselves have their roots in older cultural traditions, including religious and spiritual ones.

4.2 Cultural Linguistics and intercultural communication

In the past, intercultural communication has been investigated primarily from the perspective of linguistic anthropology (see also Wolf, 2015). For instance, some thirty years ago Gumperz (for example, 1982, 1991) introduced the notion of 'contextualisation cues' as an analytical tool for exploring intercultural communication/miscommunication. He defined 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 only possible because of the cultural conceptualisations shared by the interlocutors (see Wolf, 2015). Cultural conceptualisations provide a basis for constructing, interpreting, and negotiating intercultural meanings. These conceptualisations may be the ones that are already associated with their L1, yet they may be others that the individuals have had access to as a result of living in a particular cultural environment, or even new ones, for example those that they have developed from interacting with speakers from other speech communities

In recent years several studies have shown that in certain contexts, intercultural communication, and in particular miscommunication, reflect differences in the ways in which various groups of speakers conceptualise their experiences. In doing so, they draw on their own cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors. Wolf and Polzenhagen (2009, p. 183) 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 carried out from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, Sharifian (2010) analysed examples of miscommunication between speakers of Aboriginal English and non-Aboriginal English that mainly arose from non-Aboriginal speakers' unfamiliarity with Aboriginal cultural conceptualisations relating to the spiritual world. Many lexical items and linguistic expressions in Aboriginal English, including words such as 'sing' and 'smoke', are associated with spiritual conceptualisations that characterise the Aboriginal worldview. 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 used to cast a charm on someone with potentially 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, the 'singing' could result in her falling sick with a serious or even fatal illness (Luealla Eggington, pc). It is clear that unfamiliarity with the Aboriginal cultural conceptualisations intimately associated with 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 paper 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 this narration the speaker is remembering 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 mother's reaction to the 'medicine' as a desire to shout that is supressed by a deliberate relaxation strategy. Without having the requisite schema, the audience of the above anecdote/ 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. Again, it is clear from these examples how unfamiliarity with Aboriginal cultural schemas informing Aboriginal English can lead to miscommunication.

Another example of cultural schemas that are functioning cognitively in the background in such instances of 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 letter of recommendation for her:

Speaker A (the lecturer): *in ham nâme-yi ke mikhâstin*
This too letter-ART that requested.2P[3]
'Here is the letter that you asked for'
Speaker B (the student): *sharmandeh-am, vâghean mamnoon*
Ashamed-BE.1SG really grateful
'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, p. 237):

> Tara's (Iranian) neighbour Lara (Australian) offered to 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 intercultural communication requires a sensitivity to and an awareness of cultural difference and hence the need to recognize and negotiate meaning.

4.3 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 are in agreement with the long-standing belief that political discourse relies heavily on conceptual metaphor and that political metaphors are often rooted in certain underlying ideologies and cultural models (Dirven, Frank & Ilie, 2001; Dirven, Frank & Pütz, 2003). These conceptual devices are by no means incidental to political discourse but rather serve to establish or legitimise a given perspective (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2013).

George Bush, for example, repeatedly used either conventional or novel 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 in a very negative light, as associated with *dirt* [dirty house], while positioning himself, or the US

government, very positively, as speaking from the moral high ground 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 generally 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 & Mason, 1990), they are very likely to need to convey cultural conceptualisation found in one language by means of cultural conceptualisations found in another. However, the process of translation or cross-cultural rendering of cultural conceptualisations can be difficult since languages encode the culturally differentiated and hence historically entrenched ways in which speakers have conceptualised their world in the past and continue to do so in the present. As a result, finding sets of words that successfully capture equivalent cultural conceptualisations in another language can become fraught, depending on the degree to which the two cultures have been in contact and, as a result, have similar although perhaps not identical cultural conceptualisations. (see Avruch & 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 depend upon 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 and, in turn, link to beliefs promulgated by nineteenth 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 not even have a word for this concept. Also, a historical analysis of the dictionary entries for this concept in English reveals a tendency towards attributing positive meanings to it rather than negative ones. In general, the approach of Cultural Linguistics can help unpack aspects of political discourse that 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. Future Directions for Cultural Linguistics

Although research on Cultural Linguistics and its applications is still in its infancy, it has been shown that many features of human languages, such as schemas, categories and metaphors, can be used to index cultural conceptualisations. The discipline draws on research that has been carried out in several areas of applied linguistics, and it has already proven its ability to provide new insights into the complex relationships holding between

language and culture, especially in intercultural settings. Cultural Linguistics has also been applied to the study of second dialect learning, in particular on the part of Aboriginal English speaking children in Australia (see Malcolm, 2015). Also, application of Cultural Linguistics to the area of Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) has shown significant promise. Drawing on Cultural Linguistics, Sharifian (2013) offers the notion of *metacultural competence* (Sharifian, 2013) as a target for learners, in order to succeed in the use of English as a language of international communication. This competence enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualisations during the process of intercultural communication.

Researchers in areas of applied linguistics, such as World Englishes, intercultural communication, and political discourse analysis, as well as researchers in several other disciplines, including linguistics and anthropology, can all benefit from the robust Cultural Linguistics framework and its sharply honed analytical tools. In general, it is expected that any area of inquiry that involves the interaction between culture and language will significantly benefit from adopting the framework of Cultural Linguistics.

6. 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 coalesced at different stages in the history of the speech community and these can leave traces in current linguistic practice. Similarly, interactions at the macro and micro levels of the speech community continuously can act to reshape pre-existing cultural conceptualisations and bring new ones into being. Also, while placing emphasis on the culturally constructed nature of conceptualisations, Cultural Linguistics shares with cognitive linguistics the view that meaning is conceptualisation. 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 and cultural conceptualisations.

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Notes

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 http://www.infobarrel.com/The_Red_Envelope_-_A_Traditional_Chinese_Gift

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

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About the author

Farzad Sharifian (farzad.sharifian@monash.edu) is the Director of Language and Society Centre at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. In the last decade he has made significant contributions to the development of Cultural Linguistics as a multidisciplinary area of research. He is the author of *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language* (John Benjamins, 2011), the founding Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Language and Culture* (IJoLC), the Editor (with Professor Ning Yu, Oklahoma University) of *Cognitive Linguistic Studies in Cultural Contexts* (book series, John Benjamins). He is currently the President of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia (ALAA).