Culture, Psychology, and Language Learning

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This book demonstrates that culture and language are closely intertwined and argues that they need to be taught simultaneously from the very beginning of acquiring a second language. In the first part of the book, the author explores the close links between language and culture through looking at concepts such as ethnosyntax and gendered language. The discussion continues by examining the relationship of biculturalism and bilingualism, and the effects each can have on the other. This leads into an exploration of interculturalism and the idea of a third culture or interculture. The second half of the book demonstrates how culture and language are linked to cognition by looking at cognitive processing, emotions, and motivation in second language acquisition. This discussion illuminates some of the ways in which culture can influence the learning of a second language, and also provides fascinating insights into how culture and language affect memory and its role in the learning process.

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Culture and Language Learning

Culture

Throughout this book we will be concerned with culture, psychology, and language acquisition. We will see how closely knit culture and language are and that they need to be taught/learned simultaneously. We will first take a closer look at what culture and language are (Part One) and then delve into some of the aspects that affect both of them (Part Two). But first we need to define what culture is and see how cultural psychologists perceive culture.

Culture is the human-made part of the environment (Herskovits, 1948). It can be viewed as part of the human phenotype, the distinctive design that enables us to survive, prosper, and reproduce. Culture emerges from our lifestyle, and it occurs as individuals pool and accumulate their discoveries, and institute customs and traditions to organize their labors and settle their conflicts (Pinker, 2002, p. 60).

Markus and Hamedani (2007) define culture "as patterns of representations, actions, and artifacts that are distributed or spread by social interaction" (p. 11). Culture should not be a study of collections of people such as the Japanese, the Americans, the Germans, but it should be a study of how psychological processes may be formed explicitly and implicitly through the context, the cultural systems, and the worlds in which individuals live and thrive. Therefore, the focal point should be on the explicit and implicit patterns of practices, meanings, and artifacts found throughout the environments in which persons take part, and on how individuals are involved, incorporated, summoned, altered, and challenged by agents to realize themselves and guide their behavior (Markus and Hamedani, 2007, p. 12).

Culture is a set of attitudes, behaviors, and symbols that a group of people have in common, and they are usually passed on from one generation

to the next. Attitudes include beliefs (religious, moral, ideological, political, etc.), stereotypes, values, opinions, superstitions, and general knowledge (empirical and theoretical). Behaviors incorporate many different traditions, norms, roles, practices, customs, habits, and fashions. Symbols represent things or ideas, and their meaning stems from the individuals who allot meaning to the symbols. People attribute a particular meaning to certain symbols and pass them on to the following generation, thus evolving into cultural symbols (Shiraev and Levy, 2001, p. 5).

No society is culturally homogeneous, perhaps with the exception of Japan or Korea. There can be important dissimilarities and variations within the same cultural cluster (Shiraev and Levy, 2001, p. 5). Lehman et al. (2004) assert that culture symbolizes a mix of distinct behavioral norms and cognitions that are widespread within a determinable population. These norms and cognitions are unique from those found in other cultural groups. Normative beliefs and behaviors provide resources for attaining individual and collective goals. Moreover, culture is a means for passing on beliefs and behaviors to new individuals in the cultural group, evolving into the norms that define a culture and persevere over very long periods of time (pp. 690–1).

Cultural Psychology[1]

People and their social worlds are indivisible; they need each other. This challenging notion is a core element of cultural psychology. The psychological aspect can be defined as feeling, action, and terms of thought that are

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1   Cross-cultural psychology also uses many of the same constructs as cultural psychology. Both cross-cultural and cultural psychology are the study of cultural influences on human psychology. However, cross-cultural psychology comes to its conclusions through the comparison of at least two samples that symbolize at least two different cultural groups. Shweder (1990) maintains that cross-cultural psychology is not cultural psychology.

often called the psyche, agency, the self, mentalities, modes of operating, the mind, or ways of being, and it is based on and promotes the sociocultural. On the other hand, the sociocultural aspect is patterns in our social world; it is often referred to as sociocultural contexts, the environment, socialities, social structure, social systems, or culture; and it is based on and promotes the psychological (Markus and Hamedani, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the psychological and the cultural comprise each other (Shweder, 1990, p. 24), and they are most beneficially understood and analyzed together (Adams and Markus, 2001; Kashima, 2000; Wertsch and Sammarco, 1985).

Individuals everywhere live in groups, in relationships, in social networks, and in communities. They are very attuned and sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and actions of other people. Their means for being an agent in the world, their identities, and their selves, for example, necessitate, mirror, promote and institutionalize these sociocultural characteristics and influences. Consequently, individuals are active in constructing the world that constitutes them through the relationships with other individuals and by the ideas, products, practices, and institutions that are common in their social environment. (Markus and Hamedani, 2007, p. 4).

In cultural contexts, certain ways of acting and interacting in reoccurring episodes of everyday life make up cultural practices. These practices are not just behavior; they are meaningful acts synchronizing the actions of individuals with those of other people and concurrently conserving the social context. On the other hand, cultural products can be seen as the social order objectified. Cultural products mirror the images, ideas, values, and understandings of certain contexts and are good sources for meanings. When individuals are absorbed with these products, they simultaneously symbolize and institutionalize these values and ideas (Markus and Hamedani, 2007).

Human life is a constant process of sociocultural engagement. This is an active process that changes the biological entity, that is man, into a social person: a person who has a self and a set of context-dependent identities. In this cultural engagement process, other people, including their language, their ideas of what is true, real, and good, their comprehension of why and how to focus on, engage with, and function within different worlds, become an aspect of a dynamic self that affects and controls behavior. The

processes and patterns of individuals' social environment condition their behavior and shape their interpretive systems which in turn form the behavioral system. Within this cultural context, individuals are continuously in the process of making meaning and mirroring these meanings through their actions, transforming them into practices and products (Markus and Hamedani, 2007, pp. 5–6).

Bruner (1990) and Shweder (1990) have proposed "meaning," and Sperber (1985) and Moscovici (1981) "representation" as units of mutual constitution. According to Shweder (1984), "no sociocultural environment exists or has identity independent of the way human beings seize meanings and resources from it, while every human being has her or his subjectivity and mental life altered through the process of seizing meanings and resources from some sociocultural environment and using them" (p. 2). Bruner states that within folk psychology event representations organize individuals' meaning-making processes in everyday activities. According to Markus and Hamedani (2007), these units of mutual constitution cannot be merely located in the head of the meaning maker or in the products or practices of the world; they are dispersed throughout both. After ideas, images, and other symbolic resources have been transformed into actions, they simultaneously are forms of social practices and social knowledge.

Markus and Hamedani go on to point out that significant differences in meanings are found in how meanings are accepted and expressed in public; for example, what self is, what the group is, what emotion is. How meanings are assigned supply helpful ways of determining among cultural contexts. Various meanings have been extracted from diverse contexts such as concepts of self and identity, motivation, cognition, well-being, emotion, and group. We will take a closer look at all of these concepts in the following chapters.

In order to meet the challenge of modeling what culture is and to be able to make predictions about when and how culture makes a difference, cultural psychologists have proposed several fundamental organizing constructs to describe and determine cultural "syndromes." These models do not supply detailed descriptions of a certain culture, but instead they highlight systematic patterns that typify groups of cultures. Such models

provide possible ways for making specific and testable predictions about the consequences of culture (Oyserman and Lee, 2008).

One of the most popular models of culture differentiates individualistic² (or independent) and collectivistic (or interdependent) societies (Hofstede, 2001; Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Triandis, 2007). When studying culture, no construct has had more impact and appeal than individualism-collectivism (Triandis, 2001). This construct has been used in cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology to comprehend, explain and predict cultural differences and similarities across a large variety of human behavior. These two concepts refer to the amount of emphasis placed on the individual vis-à-vis the social group (Triandis, 1995) and appear in some form in almost all contexts, but their prevalence, dominance, or how densely they are expanded upon and distributed in any context will vary (Markus and Hamedani, 2007).

Individualism is a complex behavior concerned with oneself and one's immediate family or primary group. It emphasizes the individual, and societal structures are highly regarded in that they support individual happiness. In other words, groups benefit individuals. Collectivism is a behavior concerned with others and the care for traditions and values. It emphasizes the group, and societal structures are highly regarded in that they preserve and enhance group resources. In other words, individuals benefit groups. Therefore, collectivist group norms are likely to control individual behavior (Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Shiraev and Levy, 2001).

Bierbrauer et al. (1994) point out that norms are widely accepted standards of conduct that are appropriate for controlling the behavior of societal members. Norms mirror how much given cultures have particular behaviors or practices in common. Values are appealing standards of orientation in an individuals' life. They involve personal evaluations of the behavior or practice in question and therefore mirror the degree to which the behavior or practice is appealing (p. 191).

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2   In the literature, some researchers refer to individualistic cultures while others call these cultures independent. In the case of collectivistic cultures, some researchers refer to this type of culture as interdependent.

The amount of individualism and collectivism in a society varies, and these variations influence what has meaning and value, what necessitates consistent effort, and how persons make sense of themselves and others (Oyserman and Lee, 2008). Our perception of the world and our thinking process are affected by our culture, and our use of cognitive content, procedures, and motivation demonstrates this (Oyserman and Lee, 2008). Oyserman and Lee (2008) define cognitive content as "culturally characteristic content that is relevant, moral, central, of consequence; procedures as culturally characteristic ways of thinking and making sense of oneself, others and the world; and culturally characteristic motivations as to self-enhance or self-improve, to assert confidence and leadership or not to offend" (p. 238). The combination of these elements makes up what "goes without saying, that which feels transparent, right, and logical in context" (p. 238).

Westerners tend to approach the world "analytically" and separate what they observe into individual parts, while Easterners tend to tackle the world more "holistically"; they see the whole and underscore the interconnectivity of all things (Doidge, 2007; Nisbett and Masuda, 2006). The concept of a sole "Western" culture and the simplistic manner of contrasting "East vs. West" have been challenged (Oyserman and Lee, 2008). Studies on these two characteristics with Anglo-Americans and Asians have provided results that are similar to those between Anglo-Americans and Western Europeans. While Anglo-Americans tend to be very individualistic, Western Europeans tend to be less (Oyserman and Lee, 2008). Hofstede (2001) has proposed a listing of cultures with predominate traits either individualism or collectivism (individualism at the top and collectivism at the bottom). The top four positions were taken by the United States, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada respectively. Oyserman and Lee (2008) assert that Anglo-Americans and people from other English-speaking nations vary little on individualism (i.e. analytical view) and collectivism (i.e. holistic view), but these groups do differ from Western Europeans (p. 241). In short, Anglo-Americans and other English speaking cultural groups demonstrate less collectivism than Western Europeans and much less than Easterners.

Researchers (Cohen, 2001; Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Oyserman et al., 2002) have pointed out that all cultures are founded on evolutionary

and natural selection, and all possess similar adaptive needs. All societies probably supply adequate experience of both individualism and collectivism so that both are relevant in the same culture depending on the situation. In other words, societies have both traits of individualism and collectivism, and they are not opposing ends of the same unidimensional cultural phenomenon (Oyserman and Lee, 2008).

Self-Construal

The self is constantly and dynamically taking form through one's interactions with the social world and with close others. It is a social product that organizes and guides a great variety of social and psychological phenomena; it controls intentional behavior and allows individuals to function effectively in their social worlds. In our social worlds, people are told who they are, what they should be, and how they should create an identity. Through contact with their social environment, individuals actively generate a self, and in contrast, the self facilitates involvement in and adaptation to these environments. In other words, the self orchestrates the interaction between the individual and society. Therefore, the self is a dynamic cultural creation. An individual's view of self, emotions, and motivations evolves within a framework supplied by cultural values, ideals, practices, and structures (Cross and Madson, 1997).

In some African societies, the self is determined by one's standing in the family or clan hierarchy (Markus et al., 1997). In East Asian societies, the self is defined by an individual's important roles and responsibilities to others (Cross and Madson, 1997). In much of North America, a person is viewed as separate from society and has priority over it. These varying perspectives of the self result in important differences in psychological phenomena that are organized and mediated by the self (Cross and Madson, 1997; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

Researchers purport that Western cultures demonstrate an independent self characterized by a self-contained and context-independent entity, while Eastern cultures promote an interdependent self focusing on belonging to and dependent on a context (Lin et al., 2008). Research (Cross and Madson, 1997; Dixon, 2007; Kobayashi, 2005; Harb and Smith, 2008; Marian and Kaushanskaya, 2004; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) shows that a person's concept of self is formed partially by internalizing cultural characteristics based on a given culture. Western cultures generally value autonomy, individualism, self-realization, self-confidence, and independent agency, and these features are advanced in Western cultures and direct Westerners' self-concept. This type of self-concept is called *independent self-construal*. On the other hand, non-Western cultures are more likely to value and promote social cohesion, connectedness and collective agency, reflected in a person's self-concept. Cultures showing such features have an *interdependent self-construal* (Dixon, 2007; Friedlmeier et al., 2007; Harb and Smith, 2008; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), the independent self is most clearly seen in various segments of North American culture and in many western European cultures, while interdependent self-construal is found in Asian, African, Latin-American, and many southern European cultures. Matsumoto (1999) rejects this self-construal distinction because there is no robust cross-national distinction in it. Matsumoto also questions some of the assumptions found in this model, e.g. that culture defines self-construal and that people from different cultures have dependable differences in self-construal.

Self-construal across cultures can vary significantly. However, people within a culture may use one or the other form of self-construal to varying degrees in different circumstances within that culture (Green et al., 2005; Harb and Smith, 2008; Krishna et al., 2008; Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Park and Ahn, 2008). Consequently, both independent and collectivistic features can be found in a given culture. Each characteristic can vary from a low to high degree (Oyserman and Lee, 2008; Park and Ahn, 2008). Independent and collectivistic self-construals can be viewed as individual level dimensions of collectivism and individualism (Park and Ahn, 2008, p. 208).

Collectivist cultures that are in transition to becoming a modern society do not necessarily substitute a collectivistic orientation with an individualistic one. They seem to develop another pathway between these two orientations. Families in transitional societies seem to permit independence because the connectedness continues to be valued more than the material contribution. Subsequently, persons in such cultures stress both independence and interdependence (Friedlmeier et al., 2008; Kâgitçibâsi, 2005).

At the individual level, Kâgitçibâsi (2005) has rejected the traditional consideration of Western psychology of autonomy and relatedness. According to Kâgitçibâsi, Western individualistic construal of autonomy consists of two different meaning dimensions: interpersonal distance and agency. Interpersonal distance is linked to personal separateness-relatedness, and agency extends from agency (autonomy) to dependency (heteronomy). Consequently, Kâgitçibâsi proposed a construct of *autonomous-related self*.

These diverging cultural approaches to self-identity strongly influence how individuals sample, process, and retain information from their surroundings. According to Kwang (2005), self-construal can affect, and in some situations determine, the very essence of individual experience; this seems to be due to the important role of the self in influencing human behavior (p. 66). Independent selves seem to be more sensitive and responsive to data that focuses on their personal roles, feelings, and thoughts than interdependent selves (Marian and Kaushanskaya, 2004; Wang and Ross, 2005), which seems to have a positive effect on independent self-construal and consequently influencing creative behavior positively (Kwang, 2005). In contrast, interdependent selves are more attuned to information revolving around social interactions and collective activities than independent selves (Marian and Kaushanskaya, 2004; Wang and Ross, 2005), which seems to have a negative influence on interdependent self-construal consequently having a positive effect on conforming behavior (Kwang, 2005).

We must always keep in mind that not everyone in a Western cultural group will always be independent or in an Eastern group always interdependent. It does not solely depend on the individual and her personal history, but it is also contingent upon the circumstances or the situation at hand. Oyserman and Lee (2008) assert that we can better comprehend

individualism and collectivism as domain-specific, orthogonal constructs varyingly drawn out by social and situated cues. They, therefore, have proposed the *cognitive situation perspective* that stresses how societies supply access to differing cultural messages, dependent on whether they call up independent (autonomous) or interdependent (relational) self-construal.

An example of this is language. The self in a bilingual person, for example, is influenced by the language used at a particular point in time. Language serves as a means to convey culture with cultural variation seeping into language and affecting cognitive styles and the bilingual's self-construal (Marian and Kaushanskaya, 2004, p. 197). However, this does not mean that bilinguals necessarily have different self-construals. Bicultural individuals possess multiple concepts of self, while bilingual persons are not necessarily bicultural because they may not have the necessary cultural background and cultural experience to be so (Hong et al., 2000).

In summary, culture consists of culturally characteristic content (cognition), culturally characteristic ways of thinking and making sense of oneself, others and the world (procedures), and culturally characteristic motivations; these are the cultural elements that we are usually not consciously aware of; they are the parts of culture that feel right and logical in a given context (Oyserman and Lee, 2008, p. 238). Throughout this book we will be concerned with these three characteristics: cognition, procedures, and motivation. However, we will now turn to how culture is perceived in Second Language Acquisition.

Culture within SLA

Second language learning has been primarily concerned with language instruction since its inception as an academic field. Linguistics has traditionally been interested in the universal principles, grammatical structures and modeling at the surface level of a single sentence. Correspondingly,

the linguistic approach of Applied Linguistics, of which Second Language Acquisition is a sub-discipline, is concerned with describing the language learners acquire and explaining its structure. Intense interest (empirical and theoretical) in how second languages are acquired started in the late 1960s. A great deal of this research has been aimed at understanding and contributing to more successful language instruction (Ellis, 2005).

One important aspect of language instruction is believed to be "focus on meaning" which can signify two different things; semantic meaning (e.g. the meanings of words or of specific grammatical forms) and pragmatic meaning (e.g. very contextualized meanings that occur during acts of communication). In the case of semantic meaning, language can be treated as an object, and the instructor and the students function as pedagogues and learners. However, in the case of pragmatic meaning, the L2 is viewed as a means for communication, and the instructor and students function as interlocutors. (Pragmatic meaning could also be an object. For example, specific pragmatic meanings can be used to develop teaching materials to instruct students on the linguistic means for using these pragmatic meanings (e.g. apologizing or requesting)) (Ellis, 2005, pp. 211–12). Ellis points out that pragmatic meaning should be included in language instruction, but it ideally should not dominate language teaching.

Another important aspect of second language learning is "focus on form." It is widely accepted within the SLA field that acquisition necessitates that learners attend to form. The noticing hypothesis (Schmidt 1995, 2001) suggests that only those parts of input are noticed that are accessible to the learner for intake and effective processing. Effective learning cannot happen without exactly creating the initial mental representation of a piece of new incoming information. Thus, only those features of a targeted item that the learner notices and is aware of can be learned. Attention in this process has to be focused and not merely global. Ellis (2005) suggests that focus on form could mean that learners must attend to various things, e.g. the phonetic or graphic realizations of linguistic forms or some underlying, abstract rules. This has been a very short and inconcise overview of the field, but it does show that the primary concern of second language acquisition is language and not culture.

In psycholinguistics, one is concerned with how a new language is acquired and explores the internal processes that learners experience and the strategies they implement in acquiring an L2. SLA researchers representing the psycholinguistic perspective have been, from the very beginning, concerned with describing and analyzing phenomena such as interlanguage and the mental processes connected to its functioning (see Corder, 1967, or Selinker, 1972). (Interlanguage will be discussed more in the next chapter.) Social, cultural, and discursive contexts have not been considered to be important factors in either linguistic or psycholinguistic approaches, even though language learning takes place in such environs. However, these factors have been acknowledged as potential variables that either assist or prevent the development of an individual's internal knowledge of language (Marchenkova, 2005, pp. 171–2).

Advocates of the sociolinguistic approach were the first to question the focus on individual learners. The sociolinguistic perspective in SLA research emerged as a result of universal economic and sociopolitical changes. Sociolinguists' fundamental ideas about language are based on work by such scientists as Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whor, Franz Boaz, Lev Vygotsky, and Georg Herbert Mead. The fundamental principle of these scholars' views is that language is always based in a social and cultural context, and its primary purpose is to function as a means of communication. As this perspective gained in popularity, academic interest began to move from individual learners and their internal mental processes to communication and interaction among learners (Marchenkova, 2005, p. 172). However, sociolinguistics is primarily concerned with the sociocultural aspects of the communication process and much less with the L2 culture that the communication process could be taking place in. This short overview shows us that the main stream forms of SLA are interested in language and only peripherally in culture.

Marchenkova maintains that there is still tension within the SLA field between acknowledging the role of discursive and social aspects of language use and learning, on the one hand, and the predominant role of individual cognition in research, on the other (p. 172). It seems whichever linguistic approach one takes to language learning, language is the focal point. The real exception seems to be cultural linguistics.

In 1997, Firth and Wagner suggested that the field of SLA needed a reconceptualization in order to expand the ontological and empirical parameters within the field (p. 285). They urged for a greatly enhanced awareness of the interactional and contextual dimensions of language use (p. 285) and for comprehending language as a cognitive phenomenon (the product of a person's brain) and as basically a social phenomenon that is acquired and used interactively in various situations for diverse practical purposes (p. 296). Ten years later in the 2007 special edition of *The Modern Language Journal*, Firth and Wagner (2007a) again appealed to the SLA field urging for the same changes as in 1997. Apparently, not much had changed during these ten years (Firth and Wagner, 2007b).

However, there is one form of linguistics that seems to be concerned with culture, cultural linguistics. It draws on theoretical notions and analytical instruments of cognitive linguistics and cognitive anthropology, but not exclusively. It uses these elements to explore the relationship between culture, language, and conceptualization (Palmer and Sharifian, 2007). Language is a critical tool and component of culture (Langacker, 1999) which is embedded in culture (Palmer and Sharifian, 2007, p. 1). Language is a cultural activity and simultaneously a tool for organizing other aspects of culture. Cultural linguists feel that cultural linguistics can be applied to second language learning by clarifying cultural conceptualizations that are traditionally connected to diverse features of the L2, for example (Palmer and Sharifian, 2007). This may include the introduction and highlighting of cultural models and taking account of culture-specific models of learning itself (D'Andrade, 1995; Strauss, 1992).

There are, however, various scholars (Berkowitz, 1982; Galloway, 1980; Seaver, 1992; Tang, 2006) within the mainstream of SLA, who maintain that culture (especially behavioral culture) is important in second language instruction because it is an integral part of human communication. Social and cultural contexts and situations are very important for meaning within communication. Walker (2000) asserts that language as communication plays an important part of specific situations in a particular culture. When learning a second culture (C2), one can only perform appropriately and effectively in that culture if one has the appropriate C2 background to draw from. Culture serves as a source of meanings that consists of complicated

knowledge structures. Some of these are observable, specific, and easily expressed, and others are invisible and implied, such as *self-construal*. The implied and invisible meanings are not easily explained and defy culturally uninformed reproduction (Tang, 2006).

In order for students to attain a good level of cultural awareness, they need to be interculturally competent. Intercultural competence requires certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes that one must learn. Acting interculturally compels individuals to interrupt deeper cultural values, perhaps only temporarily, so that they are able to comprehend and empathize with the values of others that differ from their own (Byram, 2008, p. 69). The native speaker, viewed as the target norm in second language learning, has been transformed to the learner becoming an intercultural speaker. Intercultural speakers – also known as cultural mediators – comprehend the relationship between their own language and language varieties and their culture and the cultures of various social groups within their own society. They also understand the language of others and its varieties and the cultures of other groups between which these intercultural speakers find themselves acting as mediators. "Acting as mediator" is important for distinguishing between bicultural and intercultural because bicultural does not automatically involve the act of mediating (Byram, 2008, p. 68).

Our varying perspectives on the world are dependent on culture and one's perception of self or self-construal. The self is a product of the social/cultural conditions in which it has developed. This has traditionally meant that persons are influenced by social categories founded on social class, education, family, peer groups, religion, and so on. In general, this means that individuals are formed and shaped by their culture (Block, 2007). Therefore, I believe we need to use the target culture as the medium for language instruction.

We will see throughout this book that culture and language are so closely intertwined that they cannot be viewed separately. In the socio-cultural approaches to language teaching, one is primarily concerned with the immediate learning culture, language learners are involved in, during the language learning process. However, I believe that socio-cultural approaches need to be equally concerned with the target culture. Thus, language learners must receive much more C2 instruction while learning an L2. There are

scholars and researchers within the SLA field that agree with this premise, e.g. those who propagate intercultural language learning. Firth and Wagner (2007b) point out that language learning is seen as "a cognitive process that is in essence context-neutral" (p. 804). In this book, we will see that cognitive processes are not context-neutral; they can be and are influenced by culture. This needs to be considered in how we conduct a language class, as well as a part of our students' knowledge base. Understanding how culture can influence cognition will help students better understand the target culture, and be able to more effectively communicate in the L2. Competence in SLA is defined more or less by the learner's grammatical competence (Firth and Wagner, 2007b). Researchers in cultural linguistics are showing that culture is an important factor in grammar and its use (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2007). I will argue in this book that learners should simultaneously acquire culture and language, because culture has such an important influence on the use of language, e.g. as in pragmatics, as in semantics, or as viewed by cultural linguists. Grammatical competence is only one of many different competencies language learners need to possess.

The Theory of Mind (ToM)

When people learn the culture of their cultural group, they must be equipped with mental machinery that can extract the beliefs and values of the underlying behavior of this culture, in order to become competent members of it (Pinker, 2002, p. 60). To effectively accomplish this, adult learners have to utilize not only general learning or imitation skills, but also domain-specific information and procedures they have already mentally stored (Sperber and Claidiere, 2008, p. 288). In order for children to achieve this, they must be able to perceive, what the intentions of the person being imitated are. It is important that children understand implicitly that other people's focus of attention may vary from their own. This type of insight allows children to decide, whether the behavior was accidental or

intentional, and thus infer the person's goals (desires) and select the aspects of behavior that the person intended in order to reach that goal (Pinker, 2002; Stone, 2007).

Understanding beliefs and knowledge also plays an important role in this process. This learning process incorporates the extraction and the interpretation of incoming data. The interpretation normally includes enhancing the interpreted information (Sperber and Claidiere, 2008, p. 288). The mechanism for enriching this interpreted information is called the Theory of Mind (ToM) (Champagne-Lavau and Joanette, 2009; Saxe, 2006; Stone, 2007; Viale, 2007), mentalizing (Firth and Firth, 1999; Hooker et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2008), or mindsight (Goleman, 2006).

Stone (2007) maintains that the Theory of Mind encompasses an array of cognitive processes and takes several years to develop in humans (p. 319). The following skills are fundamental to the Theory of Mind: distinguishing oneself from others; comprehending that people think differently and see situations from diverse perspectives; and recognizing that another individual's goals (desires) might not be to our own best interest (Goleman, 2006, p. 136). In other words, ToM is the capacity to make inferences about what other individuals think, feel, and know (Mason et al., 2008; Saxe, 2006). It also involves the ability to understand mental activities, such as comprehending the thought processes of others and one's own (Eisbach, 2004; Loukusa and Moilanen, 2009). It is a theory about one's own and other individuals' minds and how they work (Olson and Bruner, 1996).

No one would question the fact that all people have ToM. However, some people excel at estimating another person's mental state, while others are less able to make successful estimates (Otsuka et al., 2009). Some individuals with a bad ToM tend to distort assumptions. These deluded perceptions derive from focusing on the wrong pieces of incoming information to the brain. An example of this is young college men who are prone to binge drinking. Such young men judge themselves by the norms of the most extreme drinkers. This misinterpretation causes them to believe that they must drink to excess in order to fit in. On the other hand, those people who have a good ToM avoid the mistake of deciding for the excessive as the standard. They achieve this by first judging how similar the other individual is to them. If they perceive similarity, they merely assume the other

person feels and thinks in much the same way as they do (Goleman 2006, p. 137). A continuous flow of social life relies on a steady stream of mind reading or snap judgments. In everyday situations, beliefs rather than reality are the determining factor in what a person does, and false beliefs are an important element in this process (Firth and Firth, 1999).

Reading another individual's mind to interpret their actions is an important aspect of man's adaptation to evolutionary challenges (Tomasello, 1999; Viale, 2006). This capacity is already achieved by nine-month old toddlers (Viale, 2006). Children demonstrate this once they have developed the capacity to understand that other people have beliefs we know to be wrong (Hirschfeld, 2006).

In our social world, ToM also plays an important role in comprehension. This seems to be demonstrated by autistic children, who are socially maladjusted. Such children lack the ability to understand that other people possess different beliefs and desires from one's own (Viale, 2006). They are also unable to interpret the behavior of another person, in regard to mental states; they are, however, able to correctly interpret the actions of other individuals, when these persons are members of a group. They accomplish this through the use of stereotypes, resulting in their group reasoning being independent of the capacity to judge person-based behavior (Hirschfeld, 2006).

Language seems to play an important role in the Theory of Mind, but exactly how and to what extent is not clear at the moment. However, there seems to be agreement that it has a role in the understanding and in the development of ToM. Certain forms of syntactic construction supply needed conditions for the development of a representational Theory of Mind. According to de Villiers and de Villiers (2000), a particular form of linguistic construction, sentential complements, allows children to acquire a representational Theory of Mind. This complementation involves mental states that need embedded propositions, which in turn necessitate the use of one of three kinds of verbs; verbs of desire, e.g. *want*, communication verbs, e.g. *say*, and mental state verbs, e.g. *think* or *believe*. The use of such syntax complementation permits us to illustrate our mental state as contradictory to reality (Berguno and Bowler, 2004, p. 296). This seems to be true across languages; Berguno and Bowler (2004) found it in English, Perner et al.

(2003) showed it in German, and Tardif and Wellman (2000) and Goetz (2003) confirmed it in Chinese. Moreover, children learning each of these three languages comprehended and talked about desires much earlier than beliefs (Perner et al., 2005; Saxe, 2006; Tardif and Wellman, 2000).

Apperly et al. (2009) maintain that language is necessary for the development of ToM in children. However, impairments of grammar in adults do not seem to hinder the performance of ToM tasks (Saxe, 2006; Varley and Siegal, 2000; Varley et al., 2001). Apperly and colleagues suggest that grammar may be necessary for the construction of belief reasoning in children. Moreover, executive functions (e.g. working memory, inhibitory control, hierarchal relationships) are necessary for the development of children's belief reasoning, because it is an integral aspect of the adult's capacity for belief reasoning.

Another critical aspect of ToM is that our mind takes on a perspective of the world. Children's realization of this has been tested through their understanding of false beliefs (Perner and Aichhorn, 2008). When judging a protagonist's belief, three-year-olds were unable to attribute a false belief to the protagonist. This seems to be true across languages. However, some languages have linguistic features that can highlight aspects of beliefs, e.g. Chinese has "thinking falsely verbs" (Liu et al., 2008) and Japanese has grammaticalized particles for (un)certainty (Matsui et al., 2009). When such explicit linguistic features were used in the protagonist's utterances, Chinese and Japanese children showed better understanding of false beliefs. However, these children's understanding of false beliefs was not better than the understanding of children whose languages did not have such features when these explicit linguistic features were not used in the protagonist's statements (Liu et al., 2008; Matsui et al., 2009). Matsui and colleagues attribute this occurrence to the fact that three-year-olds are not able to suppress the inherent saliency of current reality in standard false belief tasks, when the false belief is not marked by an explicit linguistic feature. And Liu and colleagues came to the conclusion that there are universal developmental trajectories of false belief comprehension for children. However, different geographical locations seemed to cause variations in the timing of this development in their study.

Milligan et al. (2007) confirm that verbal intelligence has an effect on the performance of false belief tests. This can be clearly seen in deaf children learning sign language late in their early childhood. Such youngsters not only have a language delay, but they are also similarly delayed in successfully completing a false-belief test (Peterson and Siegal, 1995; Perner and Aichhorn, 2008). Among adult learners[3] of a nascent Nicaraguan sign language, Pyers and Senghas (2009) found that some of their informants produced few mental state signs and failed to demonstrate false-belief comprehension. This study examined the development of false-belief comprehension into adulthood, and it showed that language is a critical element for this development. Furthermore, in those test persons, whose sign language developed over the two-year period of the study, there was a corresponding development of their false-belief comprehension. However, recent studies on infants have indicated that infants as early as thirteen months can perform non-verbal false belief tasks (Onishi and Baillargeon, 2005; Surian et al., 2007). Therefore, Kobayashi et al. (2008) question whether there are linguistic constraints on the Theory of Mind.

Lohmann et al. (2005) have suggested that we consider language to be a communication process by which individuals use linguistic conventions to attain communicative goals, and that we should not perceive Theory of Mind narrowly as the comprehension of false beliefs, but more as children's developing comprehension of other people in general – what Lohmann and colleagues refer to as social understanding. This understanding has two levels: 1) "the understanding of other persons as intentional agents, whose behavior is governed by goals and perceptions, and 2) the understanding of other persons as mental agents, whose behavior is governed by goals (desires) and beliefs, including ones that are false" (Lohmann et al., 2005, p. 245).

Lohmann and colleagues suggest that social understanding and linguistic communication can have different relationships depending on which of the above two levels is involved. In order for someone to understand and acquire language and communicative conventions, one must

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3   Nicaraguan sign language was their L1.

comprehend others as intentional agents. Thus, social understanding provides certain communicative skills (pp. 245–6). Lohmann and colleagues go on to maintain that certain types of social cognition – reading communicative intentions – are therefore prerequisite for acquiring and using linguistic conventions. Moreover, the use of linguistic conventions, e.g. syntactic constructions, in discourse is necessary for some other forms of social cognition, e.g. understanding false beliefs. This is a normal process in which children are biologically prepared for culture. However, participation in culture takes children's cognitive skills to new levels (Tomasello, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

Social experience promotes linguistic and cognitive development (Tomasello, 1999). Moreover, Pyers and Senghas (2009) found that some social experience is critical for the eventual acquisition of mental state vocabulary. Age does not seem to play an important role, because the informants in this study were between the ages of twenty-six and twenty-eight years old. As adults, these informants were able to develop a more mature comprehension of mental states. Consequently, language and social experience steer not only the development of children's Theory of Mind, but also the development of a mature Theory of Mind. In those cases, where the necessary linguistic elements are not available during childhood, the transition may take place decades later as adults (Pyers and Senghas, 2009).

According to Saxe (2006), "language plays predominately a communicative role rather than a constitutive role in Theory of Mind development" (p. 61). The correspondence between linguistic exposure and ToM is not dependent on the use of certain grammatical structures. Nor does the trajectory of ToM development merely comply with linguistic boundaries. Linguistic exposure is essential for the development of ToM, but not because language represents mental state concepts. It is probably due to the fact that verbal communication is the source children use to learn those concepts (p. 61). Thus, verbal communication occurs naturally and serves as a rich source of information about the structure and cause of actions and thoughts in humans. Verbal information is critical in the development of the Theory of Mind. Talks about past events and absent third persons highlight variations in perspectives, thus illustrating the structure of representational mental states (Saxe, 2006, p. 61).

Fortunato and Furey (2009) have proposed that mental time travel develops three thinking styles that affect how people perceive and interact with the world and others. Consequently, these three styles could also influence ToM. Mental time travel is "the ability to mentally project oneself forwards and backwards in time to either imagine possible future events or to re-live or experience events that have already occurred" (p. 241). The Theory of Mind Time consists of three thinking perspectives – past thinking, future thinking, and present thinking. Past thinking reflects thinking focused on risk reduction; future thinking mirrors big picture thinking; and present thinking reflects an orientation toward accomplishing things. Fortunato and Furey believe that natural variations exist because individuals use these three thinking styles differently and because the differences affect how people perceive and interact with the world and others (Fortunato and Furey, 2009). It appears that the performance on false belief tasks by children could be dependent on their ability to process tensed *that*-complements, for example, "she said that the chocolate was on the table" (de Villiers and Pyers, 2002).

Theory of Mind and Culture

The universal ToM hypothesis seems to have some limitations. Research is indicating that ToM performance may be dependent on culture. Wu and Keysar (2007) point out that perspective-taking ability (Theory of Mind) seems to be universal; however, one's use of this ability to interpret another's actions might not be. As we have already discussed in this chapter, Westerners have a more prominent representation of self than of others, and Easterners have a more prominent representation of others than of the self. Holyoak and Gordon (1983) found that Americans appraise the similarity of others to themselves more than the similarity of themselves to others, while Markus and Kitayama (1991) report that this asymmetry

does not apply to Japanese, due to the other being more prominent than the self in Japanese culture.

In their study, Wu and Keysar (2007) found that culture has a substantial influence on the use of the Theory of Mind. The Chinese informants in this study were much more focused on the perspective of the other than the American subjects. Wu and Keysar maintain that it takes an extended exposure to cultural patterns that promote attention to the other, in order to prompt an interpretational mode that is not egocentric. They attribute this to the interdependence found in Chinese culture which takes advantage of the human ability to discriminate between the mind of the self and of the other. Culture permits the development of this ability for Chinese to unreflectively interpret the actions of others from the other's perspective. Americans possess this ability; however, an independent culture, such as American culture, does not promote other-orientation and consequently, it does not supply the necessary tools to unreflectively interpret actions from the perspective of others. Wu and Keysar found that this resulted in the American informants either disregarding the other's perspective, or taking more time and effort to overcome their own perspective, while trying to comprehend what the other actually meant (p. 605).

Perspective taking is certainly critical for any social interaction. Individuals' behavior is ambiguous due to the fact that it can be motivated by various underlying intentions. Consequently, our interpretation of another individual's actions is dependent on our ability to consider that individual's mental states. Unreflective perspective taking is certainly a function of cultural patterns. Unreflective perspective taking seems to be more natural for persons of an interdependent culture than for individuals of an independent culture (Wu and Keysar, 2007, p. 605).

Research is suggesting that some aspects of language, i.e. grammar (also see above), are independent from ToM, while other aspects such as pragmatics and reading communicative intentions may deeply influence ToM throughout development. The utilization of context plays an important role in inferring the meaning of a statement, which belongs to the field of pragmatics. Furthermore, social and cognitive factors influence the pragmatic features of language understanding and expression. An

expression can have various meanings depending on the communicative situation and by understanding the communicative context one can possibly comprehend the speaker's intention. However, in order to understand the linguistic information of a statement, cognitive abilities necessary for pragmatic inference are necessary for interpreting the utterance (Loukusa and Moilanen, 2009).

Stemming from the results of studies with American and Korean students, Holtgraves (1997) has proposed that persons vary in whether they express and interpret meaning directly or indirectly, and whether they look for indirectness in statements of others. These differences are exhibited in comprehension speed and in cultural differences. The major linguistic means for politeness and face management is indirectness. Individuals from interdependent cultures seem to be more concerned with face management than persons from independent cultures. However, within a culture the motivation to save face will differ with the social context. "Greater politeness is associated with lower speaker status, greater interpersonal distance, and more face-threatening acts" (Holtgraves, 1997, p. 633). There is also a negative side to indirectness, namely a linguistic means of manipulation. Because indirect statements have various meanings, a person can deny any one of them in favor of another meaning.

Indirectness in discourse can have an important role in the unfolding and outcome of communicative episodes. An individual, who speaks very directly, will be seen as impolite and appraised negatively. In some cases, however, the use of directness can be perceived as competence or as higher status. In a culture that promotes indirectness, a person using a direct style will be observed less favorably than in a culture favoring directness. In addition to impression formation, communicative indirectness can affect how successful a speaker's intended meaning is understood by a hearer. What direct statements gain in clarity, they lose in politeness. Those individuals, who prefer a direct style, are very likely to miss the indirect meanings of another's utterances (Holtgraves, 2005).

Hara and Kim (2004) and Schouten (2007) found that people with an interdependent self-construal were more predisposed to interpret and produce indirect messages in conversations than individuals with independent self-construal. In general, Hara and Kim found that there was a

significant relationship between communicative indirectness and interdependent self-construal, and a negative association between the production of indirect utterances and independent self-construal. However, Schouten found that there is significant positive association between independent self-construal and indirect interpretation of messages. Schouten points out that this difference between her study and those of Hara and Kin and Holtgraves may be due to the fact that the distance in independence and interdependence between the two groups of informants she used, Dutch and Surinamese, is not as great as between the participants (American and Asian) in the other studies. This could be true because Surinam has been a Dutch colony for a long time, and consequently, it has been influenced in many ways by Dutch culture, and perhaps the Surinamese self-construal itself has also been influenced.

Three studies by Kobayashi et al. (2006, 2007, and 2008) have shown that culture and language can have an effect on ToM in both adults and children. Children rely on more regions of the brain than adults, and this seems to be connected to the development of their Theory of Mind. Kobayashi and colleagues (2006, 2007, and 2008) found that there are both culture and linguistic-independent and -dependent neural functions linked to ToM development, and some of the neuronal correlates of ToM start to differ from early periods in life. It also appears that some of the neuronal bases of ToM are universal, while others differ depending on the individual's cultural or linguistic background (Kobayashi et al., 2006, 2007, and 2008).

Frank and Temple (2009) point out that there may be different cultural approaches to the Theory of Mind. One cultural factor, that may have great influence on ToM, is the distinction between self-agency from other agency. Another aspect that may affect ToM is the distinction between intersubjective or situational Theory of Mind from an action-agent model. Japanese culture encourages the use of intersubjective ToM while Indo-European language speakers conceive an occurrence based on the action-agent model. Japanese speakers tend to perceive an occurrence as a situation that is beyond the control of the agent. This seems to result in differences in the mental processing of Theory of Mind.

In a neuroimaging study focusing on ToM processing and complex narrative comprehension, it was found that autism can influence the reading of passages that involve inferences dependent on intentions, emotional states, or physical causality. Mason et al. (2008) speculate that comprehending the intentions and actions of other individuals is part of the problem, but the integration of a multitude of facts about the world, an individual has to infer and integrate, while understanding discourse may also play a major role. The modified processing of a text by autistic persons underpins the conclusion that the ToM network activated in autistic people is inadequate (p. 278).

Is this similar to what L2 students might experience? If L2 learners do not have enough cultural knowledge about the target culture, are the comprehension of intentions and actions by L2 persons and the integration of facts about the L2 culture students need in order to infer, the cause of similar processing problems in language learners as in autistic children?

If a person is unable to discern the beliefs and intentions of others, that individual is not capable of the kind of learning that is necessary for culture learning (Pinker, 2002, p. 62). Because our brains are equipped with mechanisms designed to recognize the intentions and goals (desires) of others (Theory of Mind), we can imitate their intended acts. However, in my opinion this is different for adult learners of foreign languages. They have already established a filtering system based on their physical traits, their L1 culture, and their personal histories, which limit their perception of the world. Does this limit the L2 student's Theory of Mind? Or does a bilingual/bicultural individual have two distinct Theories of Mind, one for each culture/language? In order to assist L2 learners in developing their Theory of Mind for the L2/C2, we need to help them broaden or open up this filtering system so that they can read the intentions and goals (desires) of others outside their own cultural group. In other words we need to make them interculturally competent.