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Book Review

Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualizations and Language, Farzad Sharifian (2017), John Benjamins, ISBN 9789027204110

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1. Introduction

In a concerted effort to respond to the ever-increasing and authoritative impact of globalization where cultures meet, intermingle, and may at times clash, culture has been foregrounded to human consciousness. In order to be cognizant of the similarities and differences and tackle the challenges and the peculiarities of each culture, there seems to be a crying need for the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches that probe into the interconnectedness of language and cultural conceptualizations. *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualizations and Language*, written by Professor Farzad Sharifian, the chair of cultural linguistics and

the trailblazing founder of it, has been postulated as a response to this call (Sharifian, 2011a, 2015a, 2015b, 2017). As the most updated and consolidated monograph in the field to date, it lays out the ground-breaking theoretical foundations, robust analytical tools, and practical implications of Cultural Linguistics, fleshing out its fundamental theoretical and analytical concepts, including cultural cognition, cultural schema, cultural category, and cultural metaphor. Embarked upon myriads of examples drawn from different languages and language varieties and from intercultural communications, it illuminates how cultural conceptualizations are instantiated and reflected in different cultures.

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Yet, as an emerging approach, *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualizations and Language* marks a landmark by providing perspicacious understanding and interpretation into language, culture, and cultural conceptualizations across several domains, encompassing embodiment, pragmatics, emotion, religion, World Englishes, political discourse analysis, Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL), intercultural communication, and linguistic relativity. The monograph is written in such a reader-friendly style that seems appropriate not only for undergraduate and postgraduate students but also for interested novice academics and veteran Cultural Linguists. In addition to a two-page acknowledgments, a preface, and an index, the book is organized thematically into thirteen chapters. Except for the first chapter, other chapters begin with an *introductory note* and end with the *concluding remarks*.

2. Chapters I and II: Cultural Linguistics: An Overview/Cultural Conceptualizations and Language: The Analytical Framework

Stretching out the historical background of the interconnection between language, culture, and thought, and appreciate of the foundational works by distinguished scholars such as Humboldt, Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, the author cogently argues that no full-fledged subdiscipline has ever been fully developed to specifically deal with the intricate nature of language, culture, and conceptualizations. In so doing, the author posits *cultural linguistics*, with multidisciplinary origins (i.e., anthropology, distributed cognition, cognitive psychology, and complexity science), to account for the interplay between language and cultural conceptualizations. Drawing on such features of human languages as morpho-syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive aspects, the author propounds that language plays a pivotal dual role to instantiate cultural conceptualizations, or cultural conceptualizations are entrenched in a plethora of features of human languages. Accordingly, Sharifian lays out the theoretical and analytical framework to explore the cultural conceptualizations that underpin the use of human languages. With regard to the theoretical underpinning, the author postulates that *cultural cognition*, lying at the kernel of the model, illustrates emergent features, resulting from social and linguistic

interactions across the members of the speech community across time and space. Furthermore, the author picturesquely and brilliantly exemplifies that cultural conceptualizations are not only embodied through language, but also through cultural arts, literature, emotions, rituals, cultural events, nonverbal behaviors, and even more.

The second chapter, dubbed *Cultural Conceptualizations and Language: The Analytical Framework*, provides robust tools to analyze and interpret the interconnectedness between language and cultural conceptualizations. These instruments encompass ‘cultural schema’, ‘cultural category’, and ‘cultural metaphor’. As lucidly elaborated, cultural schemas and subschemas, a culturally constructed subclass of so-called “cognitive schemas” (p. 11), pertain to beliefs, norms, rules, expectations of behavior, and values which are pertinent to different aspects and components of experience. For instance, as exemplified by the author, in Chinese culture, the speech act of ‘greeting’ is closely related to the Chinese cultural schemas of *eating* and *food*. That is, people use the question “Have you eaten?” to initiate a greeting, whereas in the Persian language, greetings are mainly associated with health. Cultural categories as well as subcategories, known as the second tool, are culturally constructed and co-constructed categories such as colors, emotions, attributes, foodstuffs, kinship terms, events, etc. which are mainly instantiated in the morphosyntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive features of human languages. With regard to the cultural categories, the author demarcates *wedding* from *engagement* or *dining out*. The third analytic tool (i.e., cultural metaphors) is defined as cross-domain conceptualizations rooted in cultural traditions, including folk medicine, worldview, or a spiritual belief system. Linked with the cultural metaphor *medicine as healing power of the ancestor beings* is the use of words, including *doctor*, *doctor man*, or *medicine man*. The author concludes the second chapter by accentuating that using data from different languages and language varieties can consolidate our understanding of the relationship between cultural conceptualizations and human cognitive processing.

3. Chapter III: Embodied Cultural Metaphors

The third chapter elaborates deeply on the ‘embodied cultural metaphors’, drawing mainly on the author’s (Sharifian, 2008) seminal work on how a body part like *del*, defined literally as ‘heart, stomach, abdomen, belly, guts, mind, courage, patience, and middle’ can lead to countless expressions that manifest and characterize linguistic, cognitive, emotional, as well as socio-cultural conceptualizations. The author compendiously articulates how *del* can instantiate abstract conceptualizations of emotional, psychological, intellectual, person-bound, and spiritual faculties. So, with respect to cultural linguistics, *del* is regarded either as being tantamount to, or “the container of emotions, desires, patience, courage, compassion, thoughts, and memories” (p. 35). Moreover, some *del* conceptualizations are entrenched as something that can be “tightened, opened, wounded, emptied, filled, burned, collapsed, pulled out, get broken, or stolen” (p. 35). Besides, the chapter, referring to Avicenna’s theory of four humors and the doctrine of temperaments, touches upon Iranian traditional medicine and temperature terms which manifest “interactions between the human conceptual faculty, bodily experience, sensory perception, and cultural conceptualizations” (p. 39).

4. Chapter IV: Research Methods in Cultural Linguistics

Chapter four, encapsulating the research methods in cultural linguistics, eloquently articulates that Cultural Linguistics is a kind of linguistic ethnography intermingled with an ethnography of cultural underpinnings which is an open-ended ‘set of procedures’ to collect, analyze, and interpret data to arrive at an in-depth and insightful understanding of the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the languages with reference to the mutual role of the socio-cultural context and language. The author of the monograph enumerates some of the research methods which have already been employed in Cultural Linguistics as follows: 1) conceptual-associative analysis; 2) conceptual analysis of story recounts; 3) (meta)discourse analysis; 4) corpus-based analysis; 5) ethnographic-conceptual text/visual analysis; 6) diachronic/synchronic conceptual analysis;

7) interviews and focus group data; 8) field notes and participant observation; 9) conversation analysis; 10) analysis of naturalistic narratives.

5. Chapter V: Cultural Linguistics and Pragmatics

This chapter elucidates how ‘pragmatic cultural schemas’, serving as milestone sources of shared knowledge to appropriately communicate pragmatic meaning, construct a four-tier hierarchical association, including pragmatic schemas, speech acts/events, pragmemes, and practs. To put it succinctly, in order to interpret and instantiate the practs properly, one needs to be informed of the underpinning pragmatic schemas, speech acts/events, and pragmemes. Inasmuch as pragmatic schemas are generally conceptual in nature and practs are normally linguistic, the hierarchical association is conceptual at one end of the hierarchy and linguistic at the other. The author quotes that pragmemes are conceptualized as “general prototypes of pragmatic acts that are capable of being executed in particular situation or cluster of situations” (Mey, 2010, p. 2884), whereas practs are defined as particular manifestations of pragmemes. The author cites how the enactments of speech acts of pragmatic schemas such as *shekasteh-nafsi* ‘modesty’, *sharmandegi* ‘being ashamed’, *rudar-bayesti* ‘state or feeling of respectful distance’, and *ta’arof* ‘offer’ among Persian speakers are instantiated and reflected, substantiating that these conceptualizations are context-loaded and culture-specific.

6. Chapter VI: Cultural Linguistics and Emotion Research

From the Cultural Linguistics vantage point, chapter six foregrounds the contributions of emotions that embody both the physical dimension and the conceptual one, the latter of which is essentially cultural-specific, which per se lend emotions well to the processes of schematizations, categorizations, and conceptualizations. For instance, *love* may be associated with heart in English, but with belly in Vietnamese (Dinh & Le, 2016). The chapter specifically puts a premium upon cultural underpinnings of Persian *qam* which yields at least five categories in Western varieties of English, including *pain*, *sorrow*, *grief*,

sadness, and *worry*, as well as cultural conceptualizations of '*pride*' (Wilson & Lewandowska-Tamaszczyk, 2017) in British English, '*rain*' (Sharifian, 2010) and '*sorry*' (Sharifian, 2011b) in Aboriginal English. It is also highlighted that lack of understanding of culture-sensitive underpinnings germane to emotions can lead to intercultural miscommunication.

7. Chapter VII: Cultural Linguistics and Religion

Chapter seven demonstrates that thorough analytical tools of Cultural Linguistics can bring to light the underlying cultural conceptualizations which are pertinent to such worldviews as world, creation, life, death, morality, fate, life after death, etc. which are entrenched based on spiritual or religious systems. The chapter illuminates the analysis of Sufi spiritual path of *nafas* which is characterized as *Sufi life as a path towards becoming one with God* which is diagrammatically depicted on page 74. Moreover, the chapter elaborates on the cultural conceptualizations of *death* in Taiwanese Buddhist and Christian eulogistic idioms (Lu, 2017). Furthermore, the chapter concludes with the fact that cultural conceptualizations are not to be confined to religion, but may take into account any form of discourse about spirituality and sacredness. The author provides an instance about the conceptual basis about sacred sites in Australian Aboriginal communities who modified, reconceptualized, and localized the elements of Christianity since they adopted the religion.

8. Chapters VIII and IX: Cultural Linguistics and Political Discourse and World Englishes

Chapter eight sheds light on the significance of political discourse which undoubtedly lends to different instantiations that manifest cultural conceptualizations. Due to the overwhelmingly indispensable political arena where political discourses are often translated through international media sources or interpreters, culture-specific political keywords and their conceptual underpinnings are often misrepresented to genuinely reflect those conceptualizations. This chapter reviews

conflict of cultural conceptualizations related to *democracy* (Ansah, 2017) in political discourse in Ghana where people are much inclined to reconceptualize *democracy* in the light of cultural schema of (*im*)*politeness* as formulated by Ghanaian traditional cultural conceptualizations and Western traditions. Sharifian represents more instances of political discourse, including the cultural metaphor of *the nation as a body* (Musolff, 2017), conceptualizations related to *austerity* in political discourse (Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano, 2017), and cultural conceptualizations in military English (Wolf, 2017).

The widespread use of English has contributed to the emergence of localization of the language by speech communities who wish to express their native cultural conceptualizations. In the light of Cultural Linguistics, chapter 9 opens innovative perspectives towards the analyses and interpretations of sociocultural conceptualizations which are embedded in World Englishes to identify varieties of English that are inconspicuous with regard to their conceptual underpinnings that may make them divergent from other vernaculars. World Englishes yield contextualized sources of data which in turn enrich the exploration of the interconnectedness between languages and cultural-conceptual systems, impacted by globalization, transcultural mobility, and intercultural communication.

9. Chapters X, XI, and XII: Cultural Linguistics and Intercultural Communication, Teaching English as an International Language, and Linguistic Relativity

Chapter 10 demonstrates how influential the analysis of intercultural communication is when explored from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics. This chapter distinctly employs the instances of miscommunication which are partly due to the lack of familiarity with specific cultural underpinnings and cultural grounding that are entrenched through language which functions as a repository between speakers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal English speakers. Furthermore, language manifests cultural-conceptual system that embodies the cultural cognition of a specific speech community, the lack of which may contribute to miscommunication.

Chapter 11 brings to the fore the complications and impacts of globalization, interculturality, diversification of English, and transcultural-mobility, which legitimize the crucial need by developing ELT learners' competences. One of the most influential competences is to augment learners' meta-cultural competence to be successful in cross-cultural communication. Developing meta-cultural competence or awareness is of high-priority inasmuch as it "enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations" (p. 109). The chapter contends that if ELT curricula are enriched with various instances of cultural-conceptual underpinnings from diverse varieties of English by providing natural opportunities to let learners contemplate upon their own cultural conceptualizations, they become more enlightened about the peculiarities of sociocultural reality and diversity. The author suggests that such activities as 'online intercultural exchange' or 'telecollaboration' (Chun, 2015) and translation are instrumental in developing language learners' meta-cultural competence. Xu (2017), moreover, pinpoints that there are three principles which contribute to the development of meta-cultural competence, including 1) *acknowledging* the swiftly changing profile of English; 2) *anticipating* that English language is used to embody diverse systems of cultural conceptualizations not limited only to Anglo-based varieties of English; 3) *acquiring* familiarity with different systems of cultural conceptualizations to construct and re-construct intercultural meanings.

10. Chapter XII: Cultural Linguistics and Linguistic Relativity

Chapter 12 gives an overview of the three pre-eminent pioneers in linguistic relativity, namely Franz Boas (1995), Edward Sapir (1995), and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956). The author convincingly argues that many die-hard advocates of linguistic relativity deem 'culture' as something that is monolithic, urging them to propound a theory to consider the interplay between language, culture, and thought. Cultural Linguistics, on the other hand, proffers a theoretical and analytical framework, rather than a claim to a "theory", a 'theory complex', or 'hypothesis' (p. 118) with respect to the interconnectedness between

language and thought. Utilizing such analytical tools as 'cultural schemas', 'cultural categories', and 'cultural metaphors' as well as 'cultural cognition' which consolidates the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics, the author cogently asserts that Cultural Linguistics is not concerned with the abstract notion of 'culture', but instead it gives momentum to the exploration of multifaceted cultural conceptualizations that may not at times be accessible reflexively by contemporary speakers of language, substantiating the fact that languages involve dynamic features which embody conceptualizations that do not have active referents in the minds of their contemporary interlocutors. More importantly, Cultural Linguistics differs from linguistic relativity hypothesis in that the latter views notions of 'language', 'culture', 'thought patterns', and 'worldview' as though they are homogeneously shared by the interlocutors of a specific speech community, while the former treats cultural cognition, cultural conceptualizations, and language as heterogeneously distributed across the minds of the interlocutors of a speech community since the interplay among these concepts is dynamic and complex.

11. Chapter XIII: Recent Developments and Research Initiatives on Language and Culture

Chapter 13, the bulkiest chapter, recapitulates most of the studies, included in the author's recent book, *Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (Sharifian, 2015b), except 5 studies, to represent various approaches and methodologies, transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary conceptual foundations, analytical frameworks and dimensions, pedagogical implications, and constructs which are imbued with the study of language and culture. Moreover, the chapter provides a panoramic synopsis of the methodologies, data, and areas of study on the papers included in the author's (2017) book, *Advances in Cultural Linguistics* as well as a full description for those studies which were not elaborated upon in other preceding chapters. The chapter concludes with some new strands for research such as the investigation of cultural conceptualizations embodied in the lexicon and expressions of sacred architecture and vernacular architecture

due to the fact that architecture related lexicon can potentially manifest the social, cultural, linguistic, religious, and geographical tendencies and orientations of a particular speech community.

12. Concluding Remarks

The updated version of *Cultural Conceptualizations and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications* (Sharifian, 2011a), *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualizations and Language*, foregrounding the analytical framework, represents a significant milestone by laying out not only the theoretical but also the analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics, articulating its essential concepts of *cultural cognition*, *cultural schema*, *cultural category*, and *cultural metaphor*. What makes this ground-breaking monograph unique is that it is theoretically well-grounded, analytically well-presented, and pedagogically well-rounded with illustrative instantiations, illustrations, and examples from a wide range of language varieties, incorporating language, culture, and conceptualizations.

One encouraging aspect of the monograph lies in the fact that it is quite well written, organized, and discussed in a brilliantly argued set of chapters, often depicted through colorful illustrations and charts to increase the readability, with an influential and unique framework that embarks upon uncomplicated structure, referring to the most germane, up-to-date, and research-based studies on Cultural Linguistics. However, some parts are indeed a restatement of the author's (2011a) monograph, and some chapters are the recapitulation of previously conducted studies in Cultural Linguistics, adding little to the literature in some cases. It is, nonetheless, thought-provoking for novice readers and refreshing for the experienced ones. The book also adds a list of transliteration conventions of Persian transcripts to help all readers from any language background read the words properly. Moreover, the book enjoys succinct introductions and concluding remarks in each chapter through which the author recapitulates the quintessential ideas.

Cultural Linguistics has its own terminologies and since there is no other textbook available, and due to the high technicality in some

chapters which may prove difficult for novice scholars and undergraduates, adding a glossary of important terminology within the field of Cultural Linguistics seems to alleviate this alleged downside. Furthermore, had this guidebook included more hands-on and practical examples, exercises, tasks, discussion questions as well as Further Readings at the end of each chapter to let the readers ponder over the discussed issues and provide them with more food for thought, undoubtedly, the prospective readers would have been engrossed in the monograph more. The trivial shortcomings just addressed here fail to relegate the state-of-the-art and exquisite quality of this invaluable monograph.

As a fledging and emerging domain of research which still seems to be in its infancy, and due to dynamic and culture-specific nature of research in this domain, more research should be conducted to enrich and consolidate our understanding of the interplay between cultural conceptualizations, cultural cognition, and language. In doing so, with innovative ideas and convincing arguments, the present monograph is absolutely a must-have reference for general readers, scholars, educators, and students interested in the interaction of the multifaceted nature of language, culture, and cultural conceptualizations.

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