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LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
ЯЗЫК И КУЛЬТУРА
TIL VA MADANIYAT

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Abstract: *I propose that both culture and language are about how human beings make meaning in the world. I briefly introduce various cognitive mechanisms that human being use in making sense of their experiences. Given such mechanisms as categorization, framing, and metaphor, and so on, I discuss three examples of meaning making.*

Keywords: *culture, culture-language relationship, framing, categorization, image schemas, metaphor, meaning making.*

Аннотация: *Я полагаю, что и культура, и язык связаны с тем, как люди придают смысл миру. Я кратко представляю различные когнитивные механизмы, которые люди используют для осмысления своего опыта. Учитывая такие механизмы, как категоризация, фреймирование, метафора и т. д., я рассматриваю три примера создания смысла.*

Ключевые слова: *культура, культурно-языковые отношения, фрейминг, категоризация, образные схемы, метафора, смысл образование.*

Annotatsiya: *Menimcha, madaniyat ham, til ham odamlarning dunyoni qanday qabul qilishiga bog'liq. Men odamlar o'z tajribalarini tushunish uchun foydalanadigan turli xil kognitiv mexanizmlarni qisqacha tanishtiraman. Turkumlashtirish, ramkalash, metafora va boshqalar kabi mexanizmlarni hisobga olgan holda, men ma'no yaratilishining uchta misolini ko'rib chiqamiz.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *madaniyat, madaniy-lingvistik munosabatlar, ramkalash, turkumlashtirish, obrazli sxemalar, metafora, ma’no tarbiyasi.*

The many interconnections between culture and language. Culture and language are connected in a myriad ways. Proverbs, politeness, linguistic relativity, cooperative principle, metaphor, metonymy, context, semantic change, discourse, ideology, print culture, oral culture, literacy, sociolinguistics, speech acts, and so

forth, are just some of the areas in the study of language that deal with some obvious connections between culture and language. Several disciplines within the language sciences attempt to analyze, describe, and explain the complex interrelations between the two broad areas.(For a brief and clear survey, see KRAMSCH 1998.)

Culture and language as meaning making. Can we approach this vast variety of topics from a more unified perspective thanit is traditionally done and currently available? The relationship between culture and language can be dealt with if we assume that both culture and language are about making meaning. This view of culture comes closest to that proposed by Geertz, who wrote: "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he him self has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one insearch of meaning" (GEERTZ 1973: 5). In this spirit, I suggest that we approach both culture and language as "webs of significance" that people both create and understand. The challenge is to see how they are created and understood – oftenin multiple and alternative ways. We have a culture when a group of people living in a social, historical,2Zoltán Kövecsesmanner. This means, for example, that they understand what other people say,they identify objects and events in similar ways, they find or do not find be haviorap propriate in certain situations, they create objects, texts, and discourses that other members of the group find meaningful, and so forth. In all of these and innumerable other cases, we have meaning making in some form: not only in thesense of producing and understanding language but also in the sense of correctly identifying things, finding behavior acceptable or unacceptable, being able to follow a conversation, being able to generate meaningful objects and behavior for others in the group, and so forth. Meaning making is a cooperative enterprise(linguistic or otherwise) that always takes place in a large set of contexts (rangingfrom immediate to background) and that occurs with varying degrees of success. People who can successfully participate in this kind of meaning making can besaid to belong to the same culture. [4]Spectacular cases of unsuccessful participationin joint meaning making are called "culture shock."This kind of meaning-based approach to culture can be found in Lakoff'swork on American politics (LAKOFF 1996), Turner's investigations into the cognitive

[4] ALVERSON 1991 = ALVERSON Hoyt: Metaphor and experience: Looking over the notion ofimage schema. In: FERNANDEZ J. (ed.) Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes inAnthropology. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. 94–117

dimensions of social science (TURNER 2001), and Kövecses's study of metaphorical aspects of everyday culture (KÖVECSES 2005). Palmer makes such ameaning-based approach the cornerstone of what he calls "cultural linguistics" and applies it to three central areas of anthropological linguistics: Boasianlinguistics, ethnosemantics, and the ethnography of speaking (PALMER 1996: 4–5). What is required for meaning making? The main meaning-making organ isthe brain / mind. The brain is the organ that performs the many cognitive operations that are needed for making sense of experience and that include categorization, figure-ground alignment, framing knowledge, metaphorical understanding, and several others. Cognitive linguists and cognitive scientists ingeneral are in the business of describing these operations. Cognitive linguistsbelieve that the same cognitive operations that human beings use for makingsense of experience in general are used for making sense of language. On this view, language is structured by the same principles of operation as othermodalities of the mind. However, these cognitive operations are not put to use ina universally similar manner, that is, there can be differences in which cogniti veoperations are used to make sense of some experience in preference to another and there can be differences in the degree to which particular operations are utilized in cultures. This leads to what is called "alternative construal" incognitive linguistics (see LANGACKER 1987). Moreover, the minds that evolve "onbrains" in particular cultures are shaped by the various contexts (historical,physical, discourse, etc.) that in part constitute cultures (KÖVECSES 2005). Thisleads to alternative conceptual systems.97).Language, on this view, consists of a set of linguistic signs, that is, pairingsof form and meaning (which can range from simple morphemes to complexsyntactic constructions). Learning a language means the learning of suchlinguistic signs.

Thus, language can be regarded as a repository of meaningsstored in the form of linguistic signs shared by members of a culture. This lendslanguage a historical role in stabilizing and preserving a culture. This functionbecomes especially important in the case of endangered languages and it oftenexplains why minorities insist on their language rights. Members of a culture interact with each other for particular purposes. To achieve their goals, they produce particular discourses. Such discourses are assemblies of meanings that relate to particular subject matters. When such discourses provide a conceptual framework within which significant subject matters are discussed in a culture and when they function as latent norms of conduct, the discourses can be regarded as ideologies (see, e.g., CHARTERIS-BLACK 2004, MUSOLFF 2004, GOATLY 2007). Discourse in this sense is another source of

making meaning in cultures. A large part of socialization involves the learning of how to make meaning in a culture.[5]

Three examples of meaning making. As the first example, consider how people make sense of the spatial orientation of objects around them. What we find in language after language is that speakers conceptualize the spatial orientation of objects relative to their own bodies(LEVINSON 1996). This means that they operate with such orientations as “right” and “left” or “in front of” and “behind.” Both pairs of concepts make use of thehuman body in order to locate things in space. Thus, we can say that the windowis on my left and that the church is in front of us. If we did not conceptualize thehuman body as having right and left sides and if we did not have a forward(-backward) orientation aligned with the direction of vision, such sentenceswould not make too much sense. But in our effort to understand the world we dorely on such conceptualization.

This is called an “ego-centered”, or relativistic, spatial orientation system. Since so many of the world’s languages have this system and because thesystem is so well motivated in our conception of the human body, we wouldthink that the ego-centered system is an absolute universal and that no culture .Thus, according to Levinson, the Guugu Yimithirr must carry a mental mapin their head of everything surrounding them, with the map aligned for the fourquadrants. With the help of such a mental map, they can identify the location ofany object with a high degree of precision, far exceeding the ability of speakersof languages which have a relativist system of spatial reckoning.The second example deals with the cognitive process of categorization. Wecan suggest that there is a close connection between the nature of our categoriesand many important cultural and social issues. The classical view of categories isbased on the idea of essential features. In that view, the members of the categorymust share certain essential features. In the new rival view, categories are definednot in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (i.e., essential features), butwith respect to prototypes and various family resemblance relations to theseprototypes.How do we make sense of social debates? The emergence, existence, andoften the resolution of cultural and social issues may hinge on how we thinkabout the nature of our categories. To see how this is possible, let us consider theconcept of art. The discussion of the structure of the concept of art can shed lighton why art has

[5]CHARTERIS-BLACK 2004 = CHARTERIS-BLACK Jonathan: Corpus Approaches to CriticalMetaphor Analysis. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

been a debated category probably ever since its inception andparticularly in the past two centuries. Kövecses examines some of the history ofthe category of art in the past two hundred years on the basis of the EncyclopediaBritannica. What he finds in this history is that the category undergoes constantredefinition in the 19th and 20th centuries (KÖVECSES 2006). Different and rivalconceptions of art challenge the "traditional" view – that is, the most prevalent"conservative" view. Impressionism, cubism, surrealism, pop art, and the like, arereactions to the traditional view and to each other. But what is the traditionalview of art?The traditional conception of art can be arrived at by examining thosefeatures of art that are challenged, negated, or successfully canceled by thevarious movements of art. For example, most people believe that a work of art represents objective reality. This feature of art is canceled by the art movementsof impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism. Another feature of art that mostpeople take to be definitional is that a work of art is representational, that is, itconsists of natural figures and forms. This feature is effectively canceled bysymbolism, cubism, and abstract art. Finally, most believe that a work of art is aphysical object. This feature is canceled by conceptual art.As can be seen, even those features of art that many would take to bedefinitional for all forms of art (such as the one that art represents objectivereality, the one that it is representational, and the one that it is some kind ofphysical object) can be explicitly negated and effectively canceled.[6] This is hownew art movements were born out of a successful new definition. Moreimportantly, there are always people who do not accept the definition that mostpeople take to be definitional. This small but significant minority can constantlychallenge, undermine, or plainly negate every one of the features that themajority take to be definitional and essential. If they were essential, they couldnot be so easily challenged and canceled. We can suggest that the concept of arthas a central member – the traditional conception – and many noncentral ones.The noncentral ones may become the prototypes of art for some people, and thenthese new prototypes can be further challenged. Concepts like art assume aprototype-based organization, and it is their very structure that invitescontestation. We can only understand the nature of the widespread phenomenonof cultural and social debates if we study and understand the nature of ourcategories that give rise to and invite debates by virtue of their very structure.Our

[6] FILLMORE 1982 = FILLMORE Charles: Frame semantics. In: Linguistics in the MorningCalm. Seoul: The Linguistic Society of Korea – Hanshin, 1982. 111–137.

third example has to do with how we represent knowledge in the mind.Categories are mentally represented as frames, schemas, or mental models (see,e.g., SCHANK–ABELSON 1977, FILLMORE 1982, LANGACKER 1987, LAKOFF 1987).We can use the following working definition of frames: A frame is a structuredmental representation of a coherent organization of human experience.Frames are important in the study of almost any facet of life and culture –and not just language. The world as we experience it is always the product ofsome prior categorization and framing by ourselves and others. A crucial aspectof framing is that different individuals can interpret the "same" reality indifferent ways. This is the idea of "alternative construal" mentioned above.How do we categorize the various objects and events we encounter in theworld? Clearly, many of our categories are based on similarity (especially of thefamily resemblance kind) among members of a category. That is, manycategories are held together by family resemblances among the items that belongto a particular category. [7] In this sense, most of our conventional categories forobjects and events are similarity-based ones. For example, the things that one canbuy in a store are commonly categorized based on their similarity to each other;thus, we find different kinds of nails (short and long ones, thick and thin ones,etc.) in the same section of a hardware store. They form a similarity-basedcategory. However, we can also find nails in other sections of the store. Somenails can occur in sections where, for example, things for hanging pictures aredisplayed. Clearly, a nail is not similar to any of the possible things6Zoltán Kövecsespicture frames, rings, short strings, adhesive tapes, maybe even a specialhammer) displayed in this section. How is it possible that certain nails appear inthis section? Or, to put it in our terms, how is it possible that nails are put in thesame category with these other things? The answer is that in addition tosimilarity-based categories, we also have "frame-based" ones. That is to say,categories can be formed on the basis of which things go commonly andrepeatedly together in our experience. If we put up pictures on the wall by firstdriving a nail into the wall and then hanging the picture frame on the nail bymeans of attaching a metal ring or a string on the frame, then all the things that we use for this purpose may be placed in a single category. But this category willbe frame-based – not similarity-based.Now there can be differences across and even within cultures in the use ofthis meaning-

[7] Encyclopedia Britannica = Encyclopedia Britannica Ready Reference. Version on Dellcomputers (2003).

making device. An interesting example is provided by a study by Glick conducted among the Kpelle of Liberia. Kpelle farmers consistently sortedobjects into functional groups (such as knife and orange, and potato and hoe),rather than into conceptual categories (such as orange and potato, and knife and hoe) (GLICK 1975). The former is what we would call frame-based categorization,whereas the latter is similarity-based one. On the whole, Westerners prefer tocategorize objects based on similarity. When Glick asked the Kpelle how a fool would categorize the objects, they came up with such neat similarity-based piles. Clearly, cultures can differ in the use of meaning-making devices, and the sedifferences may produce differences in the use of categories and language ingeneral.

Conclusion. Culture and language are connected in many ways and the interconnections canbe studied from a variety of different perspectives. Following Clifford Geertz, Itried to develop a view of the relationship that is based on how we make sense ofour experiences – linguistic or otherwise. Recent cognitive science and cognitivelinguistics provide us with new ideas and methodological tools with which wecan approach the issue of meaning making in cultures both in its universalaspects and in its infinite cross-cultural variety.

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