# LANGUAGE AND CULTURE STUDIES – WONDERLAND THROUGH THE LINGUISTIC LOOKING GLASS

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**Abstract**. *The paper examines how language might influence and be influenced by culture, and what can be found out about a particular culture by studying its language by providing an overview of the relationship between the study of language and the study of culture. The common ground of their research interests is identified as language and society, language use, and language and thought, and illustrated with the relevant notions, findings and research from the disciplines such as anthropological linguistics, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, contrastive rhetoric, applied linguistics, and cognitive linguistics.*

**Key words**:  *Language and culture studies, language and society, language use, language and thought*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine an enthusiastic traveller to a new land – excited and eager for novel experience and new knowledge, well-equipped with phrase-books, perhaps even a translating software gadget, under the impression that he is able to find his way around, being, more or less, able to find translation equivalents. Yet, his situation seems a bit (or even more than a bit) surreal, not unlikely to that in which Alice found herself in Wonderland. Although there may be words, objects, institutions, beliefs, aspects of behaviour, etc. that bear resemblance to our own world, and can be expressed in terms of our own language, there are many things that cause wonder, because either the language is used in a way different from ours, or the whole integrated pattern of the world around us is (totally) different.

We do not have to follow Alice down the rabbit-hole or even our curious traveller on his journey to be in the situation described above. As human beings, we seem to be constantly wondering at the world around us, creating, re-creating and comprehending it, and trying to translate our thoughts into language. Therefore, it is no wonder that the relationship between language and the world has always been an intriguing area of thought. And,

from the first part of the 20$^{th}$ century, booming into the past few decades, the study of language and the study of culture has become a legitimate, popular and thriving academic pursuit.

The key issues here are whether and how language might influence culture, and what we can find out about a particular culture by studying its language. On a more general scale, we might also be interested in how the study of language structure and functions can be used as a model for other semiotic systems. Looking at the other side of the same coin, we may ask to what extent the knowledge of a particular culture is a prerequisite for interpretation of words, linguistic expressions, and whole discourses.

This paper is an attempt to provide an overview of the relationship between the study of language and the study of culture and some common ground of research interests such as language and society, language use, and language and thought.

### 1.1. Language and culture studies

Defining culture or just providing references to at least some of the major literature dealing with it goes far beyond the aim of this paper. For our purpose it will suffice to quote a few dictionary definitions and point to the main elements of the relevant senses of the word. Thus, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, as 5a/, defines culture as 'the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations'. Another usage in the same dictionary, stresses the social aspect of culture and defines it as 'the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group'. The OED, in a similar vein, states that culture is ' a particular form, stage, or type of intellectual development or civilization in a society; a society or group characterized by its distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, etc.' It almost goes without saying that there can hardly be any learning  or transmitting knowledge or intellectual development without language. Nor can a society or a group function without language.

On the other hand, the study of language, or, more precisely, the scientific study of language, is the domain of linguistics. According to the linguist's focus and range of interest different branches may be distinguished. The traditional areas of historical, theoretical and descriptive linguistics, with their subfields of phonology, morphology and syntax is what is usually considered the 'core' linguistics. In the past fifty years or so, the overlapping interests of linguistics and other disciplines resulted in the setting up of new branches, sometimes popularly called 'hyphenated', to stress their interdisciplinary nature. Among them, some of the most prominent ones are psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, text linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and applied linguistics, and it is primarily in some of these fields that we should look for the research focused on the relationship between language and extralinguistic elements which may be subsumed under the term 'culture'.

Combining the areas of study, language and culture, we come up with a seemingly ambiguous phrase 'language and culture studies'. It is actually the title of an academic course which is offered at many universities, especially in the USA, and is, most unambiguously and undisputedly, devoted to the study of the relationship between language and culture. Mostly, it is an introductory course, a prerequisite for higher courses such as Linguistic Anthropology, Sociology or even Cognitive Studies. The structure of the course may vary, as well as the particular points of emphasis, but they are chiefly com-

parative and examine the ways different cultures and languages represent, organize and express thought, knowledge and emotion, discussing topics that range from the culturally specific to the universal. In their more ambitious versions, these courses also offer a broader perspective on the importance of theories of language for explaining and understanding culture across multiple disciplines, including social and literary theories (to the extent they focus on culture and performance).

## 2. LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

From the above definitions of culture it can be noted that one of the central elements in them is that culture is realized within society or a social group. Probably the most important instrument of socialization that exists in all human societies and cultures is language. It is largely by means of language that one generation passes on to the next its customs and beliefs, and by which members of a society come to be aware of their place in it. Some of the major disciplines studying society and man's position in it are sociology, anthropology and ethnology. The area where they touch upon language is the true province of linguistic disciplines such as anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and ethnolinguistics.

### 2.1. Anthropological linguistics

Anthropological linguistics is usually what one first thinks of when talking about the relationship between language and culture. It studies language variation and use in relation to the cultural patterns and beliefs and relies heavily on theories, methods and findings of anthropology (Heč 1979). The beginnings are associated with the work of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and his research among the natives of the Trobriand Islands. In order to investigate the social aspects of these communities Malinowski found it crucial to study their language behaviour. He enriched linguistics with the idea that language is a mode of action rather than a countersign of thought, as well as with the terms such as 'phatic communication' and 'context of situation'. The first one refers to the fact that language is sometimes not used for conveying thought and exchanging information, but simply for maintaining social and personal rapport, like in exchanging greetings or soothing a child. The second one, context of situation[1], refers to treating a living language as it is actually used by people, fitted into their everyday activities as their inseparable part. However, Malinowski tended to consider this aspect of language more important for 'primitive' languages and societies. This somewhat suprematist and judgmental attitude was soon abandoned in favour of the more objective approach inspired by the work of the sociologist Emile Durkheim and his functionalism, as well as earlier by American anthropologist Franz Boas in his studies of American Indians. Boas had an enormous influence on the development of American linguistics by postulating methods for describing speech patterns of American Indian languages, a work later carried on and perfected by Edward Sapir and his followers.

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[1] Deriving from Malinowski, in the linguistic theory of the British linguist J. R. Firth the term 'context of situation' came to mean primarily part of the linguist's analytical apparatus, relating features of the external world to different levels of linguistic analysis (phonology, grammar, semantics) of utterances.

Some of the most common topics of anthropological linguistics deal with the way some linguistic features may identify a member of a (usually primitive) community within a particular social, religious or kinship group. Indeed, the structure of kinship is one of the prime topics where anthropologists heavily draw upon linguistics, i.e. vocabulary. Is there any cultural significance in the fact that Serbian, for instance, has a far richer kinship vocabulary than English? Comparative approach can here prove insightful too (cf. Vuković 1980).

The much-cited examples of the extensive vocabulary for 'snow' in Eskimo and 'camel' in Arabic were often used to prove (or, more recently, disprove) the correlation between vocabulary differences and cultural differences, but the correspondence is far from being simple and clear-cut. Even less is the association between one's thought and perception of the world as determined by one's language, as advocated by the proponents of American anthropological linguistics Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, in their theory of language relativity, which is going to be discussed in the fourth section of this article.

Contemporary anthropological linguistics still has plenty of uncharted territory to explore. The most massive and detailed research is being carried out on the indigenous languages of Latin, Central and North America (Silver and Miller, 1997, Gnerre 2000, Sammons and Scherzer 2000, *inter alia*) and to a smaller extent, Africa (Webb and Kembo-Sure 2000).

The term linguistic anthropology is sometimes used interchangeably with anthropological linguistics, but more specifically it refers to a much broader  area, including not only mother disciplines of anthropology and linguistics, but also sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, paralinguistics, cognitive anthropology, and literary studies (cf. Salzmann 1993, Duranti 1997, Shaul and Furbee 1998, *inter alia*). The scope of the subject-matter covered by linguistic anthropology is well-illustrated by the variety of topics and analyzed languages in the leading journals in the field, *Anthropological Linguistics*, and the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*.

Regarding this linguistic discipline it should be noted that the link between linguistics and anthropology dates back to the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, which laid the basis for a new approach in sociology and anthropology,  having made the study of language the model for the study of other systems. De Saussure's rejection of the old philologists' idea of 'superior', 'more perfect' or 'primitive' languages was paralleled in the anthropologists' idea that culture is not something that is disseminated from the master races, and thus the culture and institutions of a 'primitive' society should be looked at from the standpoint of their functionality to those societies. Also influential was de Saussure's idea of language as a system of mutually defining entities and, especially, his theory of meaning with the notions of signifier, signified, and sign, where meaning is not accorded by a simple correspondence of a sign to an external object, but by the relation of the sign to the whole code of signification. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss suggested that not just language, but culture itself could be looked upon as a code of meaning in de Saussure's sense, its different aspects interacting and supporting each other, and in that way he was able to develop a fuller understanding.

## 2.2.  Ethnolingustics

Overlapping to some degree with anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics is ethnolinguistics, which studies language in relation to the study of ethnic groups and behaviour. The chief notion is language as the mode of ethnic identity, as in, for instance, the manifestation of ethnicity through specificities in use of a particular language variety, or in the choice of language variety for communicating with another ethnic group. Language is an important indication of ethnic and nationalistic movements because it is a very obvious characteristic of the life of a community and an extremely far-reaching one. The issues of ethnic identity are most often related to the demands and needs of ethnic minorities within a larger community (such as immigrants, or in ethnic tribal strife, etc.), and to some primarily sociolinguistic issues such as bilingualism and societal multilingualism.

Nevertheless, in spite of the strong and obvious link between language and ethnicity in many communities, there is no simple equation. To illustrate with a very close example: despite the indisputable linguistic similarity between Serbian and Croatian, which linguistically still identifies them as a single language, the conflicting ethnic and nationalistic consciousness, which culminated in separate states in the 1990s, led to the official establishing of as many as three (Bosnian included) separate languages (Bugarski 2001). This situation is quite opposite from, for instance, English, a single language used by markedly different ethnic groups (Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland) and nations (British, Australian, Canadian, etc.). Needless to say, sometimes it is very difficult to dissociate ethnolinguistic theory and especially empirical research from current political issues (Bugarski 1997a, 1997b, Bamgbose 1991, *inter alia*).

The term ethnography of speaking (communication) sometimes means the same as ethnolinguistics, but, more specifically, it usually refers to an anthropological approach to the study of language use, developed by D. Hymes (Hajmz 1980), which is based on the actual observation of speech in the act of communication, the speech event. Hymes's model of communication  proved to be of major value to sociolinguistics and discourse analysis.

## 2.3.  Sociolinguistics

While anthropological linguistics and ethnolinguistics focus on the relationship between language and some particular aspects of social life and social roles, sociolinguistics is supposed to investigate all aspects of this relationship in the society as a whole. With the starting assumptions that all language events consist of a piece of language in a social context and that every different social context determines a particular form of language (Stockwell 2002:5), the potential scope of sociolinguistics is enormous. It studies how language is used in a living and complex speech community, from micro sociolinguistic issues dealing with correlations between language variation and use and social groups and situations, to macro sociolinguistic issues such as social attitudes to language, the patterns and needs of national language use, etc. The latter approach, which focuses more on the role of language in society and suggests a greater concern with sociological rather than linguistic explanations, is also known as the sociology of language.

One of the key issues here concerns multilingualism and bilingualism, in a social group as well as in an individual speaker, as the most obvious cases of language varia-

tion. To the already discussed relation between language and ethnic identity, language rights of minorities, and political factors accompanying these issues, we should add the notions of pidgins and creoles, standard and vernacular languages, language loyalty, diglossia, code switching and code mixing, and language accommodation. They basically refer to various social situations and language behaviours where the speakers are exposed to or forced or willing to use more than one language, or a variety of language or speech.

Some further manifestations of language variation are sometimes less obvious to identify distinctly. They include regional dialects and social dialects, reflecting that in many communities it is possible to tell from a person's speech not only where (s)he comes from but also what class (s)he belongs to, although there seems to be a general tendency that the speech of the higher classes demonstrates less regional variation (cf. Trudgill 1990, Labov 1966, 1972, 2001).

Also important is the gender-related language variation, the field of study which has especially flourished in the past couple of decades. There are various ways in which the linguistic behaviour of men and women from the same speech community differs – pronunciation, vocabulary, conversational practices, etc. For example, several studies have found that women tend to be more polite, and use more of the standard forms of language, which is frequently explained by their social class awareness, their role in society, or their status in general as a subordinate group (Coates 1986, 1998, Holmes 1995, Tannen 1996).

While these aspects of the socially relevant language variations focus mostly on language users, their ethnicity, gender, social background, etc., there are some aspects which primarily focus on language use, reflecting particular contexts. The way people talk in court, in school, at business meetings, for instance, is more formal than the relaxed language they use at home or with people they know well. Similar differences are noticeable when we speak to people of a different age or social group. Such language variations, are generally known as style, or stylistic differences, although the term register is also used. However, it is better to restrict the latter term to distinctive styles shaped by functional demands of specific situations or occupations – a sports announcer talk, for instance, or a group of specialists, e.g. cardiologists, computer programmers, carpenters, etc., talking about their specialty.

Stylistic differences have been mainly studied with reference to the addressee – their age or social group. For sociolinguists especially interesting has been the issue of politeness, the notion developed by pragmatists (Brown and Levinson 1987), which refers to showing awareness of other people's public self-image (face) and can be manifested as positive (showing solidarity) or negative (accepting another's right not to be imposed on). In communication speakers make appropriate linguistic choices in the light of their relationship to the addressee, in order not to make them uncomfortable. In all societies there are sociolinguistic rules for, for instance, polite acceptance or refusal, greetings, conversation topics, forms of address, and these differ cross-culturally. What is acceptable, even desirable linguistic behaviour in one society may be unsuitable, even taboo in another. These differences may seem totally random, but they are actually closely connected with different social values and attitudes of different societies.

One of the most obvious forms of politeness are the forms of address, reflecting social relationships along the social dimensions of distance or solidarity and relative power or status. From Brown and Gilman (1960) on, numerous studies have investigated forms of address, providing significant insights into social structure, social values and social

changes (cf. Ervin-Tripp 1972, Vidanović, Mišić Ilić *et al.* 2000, *inter al.*). The choice range between using the first name and the T-pronoun ($2^{nd}$ person singular) to the title + last name formula and the V-pronoun (honorific form, in many languages $2^{nd}$ person plural) varies not only across different languages and societies, but across social groups of the same society, and through time. For example, the fact that in a certain society V/title+(last) name is used not only for older relatives but for parents as well, explained by Brown and Gilman's model (1960) will tell us that it does not indicate only respect for, but also the distance and power of the addressee. Or, the insistence on T/first name address in most American-based multinational companies is a sign not of personal friendships or lack of politeness but of the striving for company solidarity and unity, insistence on shared attitudes and values regardless of the differences in professional status.

From the point of view of this article it is important to ask what correlations between a language variable and a particular social aspect tell us about a particular society and culture in general. How are the obtained data to be interpreted in order not to be just comparative lists with value judgments and impressionistic explanations? For this purpose, sophisticated research methodology, as well as a theoretical model is needed, the one which can place the data in a broader social and cultural perspective.

## 3. LANGUAGE USE

Although generally speaking both the previous section and this one deal with language use, the perspective is somewhat different. 'Language and society' emphasized the factors of the social context which affect the use of language and the disciplines studying it, whereas this section will focus on disciplines which examine particular aspects of language use – interpretation of meaning in use (pragmatics), the structure of larger chunks of language (spoken or written) in some context (discourse analysis), written and oral communication across languages and genres (contrastive rhetoric), and various areas of applied linguistics, in particular foreign and second language teaching and communication.

### 3.1. Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

The most general area of the study of language from the point of view of its use is pragmatics. It is primarily concerned with language users – the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, the effects of their use of language on other participants in an act of communication.

In the early days of the discipline the major work was done by philosophers interested in philosophy of language, logic, meaning and extralinguistic reality. On its linguistic side, pragmatics shares the interest in the study of meaning with semantics, but widens the scope. In its linguistically-oriented version, called pragmalinguistics, it deals with those aspects of context which are formally encoded in the structure of a language. On its social end, it is related to sociolinguistics, so that the term sociopragmatics is used, and it studies how the conditions of language use derive from the social situation, most of which have been mentioned in the previous section of this article.

Rather than exploring the meaning of words and utterances by themselves, pragmatics deals with what is it that people mean by their utterances in a particular context and how

what is said is influenced by the context (the setting, the circumstances, the participants, the distance or closeness (physical, social, conceptual) between them).

While talking, people do not only produce meaningful utterances, they also perform actions via those utterances, which are known as speech acts – apologizing, promising, complaining, complimenting, inviting, etc. This can be done directly or indirectly. The speech act theory (Searle 1992) states that producing a meaningful utterance is usually more than producing a meaningful linguistic expression (a locutionary act). Speakers produce utterances with some kind of purpose in mind (illocutionary act), the communicative purpose, known as illocutionary force. A declarative sentence "There's some orange juice in the fridge" may thus be meant as a statement, offer, explanation, apology, etc. Of course, whoever utters that sentence, assumes that the hearer will understand the intended effect, the perlocutionary effect. Whether these three aspects of a speech act will coincide and whether the intended illocutionary force will be recognized by the hearer is a matter of practical concern  in everyday life and deserves a considerable caution in actual communication. In the study of pragmatics it deserves a lot of research, particularly cross-culturally.

Pragmatics also explores invisible meaning – how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated. Speakers assume that certain information is already known to their listeners, that there is a degree of shared knowledge. For many years pragmatics was predominantly concerned with the logical analysis of two aspects of this phenomenon, presupposition and entailment. The former refers to something that the speaker assumes to be true before he makes an utterance, while the latter is something that logically follows from what has been asserted by the utterance.

Entailments should not be confused with another important type of implied, additionally conveyed meaning, called implicature, for many linguists one of the central issues in pragmatics. While entailments can be interpreted purely by means of a logical analysis, implicatures require some cooperative behaviour on the part of the listener. The assumption of cooperative interaction in communication was stated in terms of the cooperative principle and elaborated in four sub-principles, the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner (Grice 1975). For most part, people normally provide the appropriate amount of information (quantity), they do not lie (quality), they stick to the point (relation), and try to be as clear as possible (manner). However, deliberate violation of the maxims (flouting) does not necessarily mean the faulty or unsuccessful communication, but, on the contrary, listeners still assume that the verbal interaction is cooperative and make inferences of what is conveyed, implied via conversational implicatures, rather than of what is merely said by the linguistic expression. Again, in cross-cultural communication, the sociopragmatic etiquette concerning the degree of (in)directness, and the responsibility on the part either of the speaker to be as straightforward as possible or on the part of the listener to make much more interpretation effort to infer the meaning is an issue very much worth investigating.

Closely connected with pragmatics, so much that topics frequently overlap and are treated in the same book (Yule 1996, Cutting 2002), is discourse analysis, a discipline that covers an extremely wide range of topics. They both study language in use and focus on context (physical, social, and socio-psychological factors), larger stretches of language (spoken and written discourse) which are unified and meaningful, i.e. coherent and relevant, and the functions of verbal interaction. The most influential approaches to discourse

analysis are the study of exchange structure (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) and conversation analysis (Cook 1989).

While discourse analysis puts the main emphasis on the structure of written and spoken discourse (text and conversation), and sociopragmatics on primarily social concerns of interaction and conversation analysis, the pragmatic approach to discourse analysis would pay more attention to  psychological concepts such as background knowledge, beliefs and expectations of the speaker and the listener.

Most of our ability to interpret the unsaid, to 'read between the lines', is based on some pre-existing knowledge structures, familiar patters from previous experience, generally known as a schema, or, more often in plural, schemata. It is almost inevitable that our schemata for making sense of the world will be culturally determined, by the contexts of our basic experiences. The study of different expectations about the ways in which meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures is the domain of contrastive pragmatics, sometimes also called cross-cultural pragmatics.

Some chief notions of pragmatics and discourse analysis such as cooperative principle, types of speech acts, turn-taking in conversation, based on primarily general middle-class Anglo-American cultural background, in cross-cultural pragmatics need to be reassessed. For instance, certain cultures show a preference for being as little informative as possible, for allowing long silence intervals in conversation, or they interpret concepts like greeting, thanking, complimenting, apologizing, etc, in a way substantially different from ours. It is the task of the researcher to step out of his/her own ethnocentric perspective while dealing with these intriguing issues, as some among the numerous studies in this area have managed to do (Gumperz 1982, Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989, Wierzbicka 1991, *inter al*.).

## 3.2.  Contrastive Rhetoric

Contrastive rhetoric is a relatively new discipline in comparative linguistics whose foundations date back to the article 'Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education' by R. Kaplan (1966), where he, using the method of text analysis, analyzed essays written by students from various speech communities. The main hypothesis of contrastive rhetoric is that written texts exhibit culture-specific discourse patterns. They can be reflections of different thought patterns caused by the internal logic of a particular culture, but also by different writing conventions learnt and acquired in a particular culture (Kaplan 1988).

Texts of a similar nature are analyzed in order to examine closely language patterns that exist in a particular speech community. Comparing these patterns with those from other languages, we get significant insights about our own cultural heritage compared to others. This should, hopefully, result in more successful communication at the level of international written communication, thus avoiding socio-pragmatic failure and meeting cultural expectations of the audience (cf. Bloor and Bloor 1991).

The main research of written discourse was done on the corpus of academic written discourse, from student compositions and essays to scientific research papers and monographs (cf. Connor 1996). English being the dominant language of international communication, there is no wonder that most researchers compared English with other languages or analyzed texts written in English by native speakers of various languages  German - Clyne 1987, Finnish – Maurannen 1993, Polish – Duszak 1994, Czech – Čmejrkova 1996, Serbian – Blagojević 2000, *inter al*.)

From its pedagogically-oriented beginnings, contrastive rhetoric has expanded its field of interest, which now ranges from contrastive text-linguistics (comparing discourse features of various languages and genres), via studying writing as an activity of a particular culture and the writing process in a foreign language, to the contrastive study of different intercultural traditions and ideologies.

### 3.3.   Applied linguistics

The language-related issues arising from its use in various areas of experience can be approached by applying linguistic theories and methods and this is the primary concern of applied linguistics. Though frequently equated with second/foreign language teaching, it actually includes a range of fields such as lexicography, translation, clinical linguistics, forensic linguistics, etc.

Foreign/second language teaching and learning is doubtlessly the most well-developed branch of applied linguistics. The idea that language should not be learnt only as vocabulary and a series of phonological and grammar structures, isolated from its actual use, became a truism a long time ago. The notion of communicative competence, adopted from sociolinguistics, has become a more desirable learning goal than language accuracy. Recently, of both theoretical and practical interests have become numerous (socio)pragmatic studies focusing on various pragmatic aspects of second/foreign language learning and the ways how non-native speakers communicate in a second language (Kasper and Bloom-Kulka, eds. 1993).

Turning from social and pragmatic aspects to culture in the most general sense, books and articles dealing with the content of and approaches to the teaching of target language culture, the role of teachers as culture bearers etc. are far too numerous to be mentioned (Kramsch 1993, Tomalin and Stempleski 1993, Hinkel (ed.) 1998, *inter al.*). However, relatively recently there has been a shift from emphasizing the understanding of the culture of the target language, to the rising emphasis  on intercultural dimensions of language learning and communication between learners, non-native users, and native speakers.

From the point of view of a foreign language teacher of the most-widely taught and learned language, English, this shift has been evident in the changed teaching materials by leading ESL/EFL publishers, moving away from the ethnocentric position of the British/American English language and culture to that of the world English, or international English.

Form the perspective of this article, apart from foreign language teaching, especially worth noting is the application of linguistic knowledge to the area of sociolinguistics. Applied sociolinguistics (Spolsky 1998) is concerned with matters of language planning and language policy, language standardization, primarily in multilingual speech communities, which are both influenced by and have consequences for the formation of national, ethnic, and social identity, language being the primary means in the process. Related to this is the foreign language education policy and language diffusion, particularly in the light of the growing hegemony of the English language, seen by some as the imperialism of English-speaking countries, mainly the USA (Phillipson 1992)

Reacting to accelerating globalization and the accompanying awareness of both global and pluralistic nature, language teachers, educators, and social scientists alike have recognized the significance of and the need for a kind of education that will enhance in-

tercultural communication, especially in certain walks of life such as international politics, business and economy. An example of applying the discourse approach to the study of such professional intercultural communication can be found in Scollon and Scollon (2001). It takes into consideration both culture and discourse systems (ideology, socialization, education, forms of discourse) and is especially valuable when focusing on members of different groups in direct social interaction with each other. What is generally sought for is the promotion of cross-cultural, intercultural, and multicultural understanding. Through the comparisons of cultural values, assumptions, and attitudes, and modes of verbal and non-verbal communication, cross-cultural miscommunication is hoped to be minimized, as well as language-related and language-constructed prejudices and stereotypes.

Apart from the more or less traditional areas of applied linguistics, in certain circles the term has been so much extended to include the study of every aspect of language use in a social reality. The efforts of social sciences, cultural studies, and linguistics seem to have joined in the form of critical discourse analysis, which examines how language works in contemporary society and reveals how discourse reflects and determines power structures, and how understanding these processes can enable people to resist and change them (Fairclough, 1991, 1995).

## 4. LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

Though sometimes simplistically viewed through its most obvious function of exchanging information and thought among people, i.e. through its referential, communicative aspect, language has other functions as well. One of the very important aspects is cognitive, which highlights the use of language as an instrument of thought and cognition, without necessary communicating the thoughts to others, as stressed by the very influential generative paradigm.

The relationship between language, thought and reality has fascinated philosophers and linguists for centuries, so this article will necessarily be able only to outline  some of the significant research. What we are primarily interested in here is whether one's language determines or is determined by one's world view. Extending a person's world view to culture in the broadest sense of the word, we shall focus on the relationship between language and its cultural aspects, rather than psychological ones, on the one hand, and human cognition, on the other.

At the end of the previous section there has already been some indication of this issue, when we mentioned the premise of critical discourse analysis that discourse not only reflects reality, but language can be (intentionally) used in the construction of a particular reality.

The idea that the way we see the world is (to some degree) dependent on the language we use is an old one, but it was most clearly and influentially voiced by Wilhelm von Humboldt in his contention that each language contains a peculiar *Weltanschauung* (world view), which causes its speakers to see and think in a characteristic way, different from the speakers of other languages. This has become known as the principle of language relativity.[2]

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[2] For one of the most comprehensive accounts and critical appraisal see Miller 1968, and especially Bugarski 1984:131-157.

In the first half of the 20th century these ideas were particularly embraced in America, by the anthropologist F. Boas and linguist Edward Sapir, and expanded by Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf in what became known as the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' of language relativity. Whorf's much-quoted statement that language is 'the shaper of ideas' and that 'we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages' has become the credo of linguistic determinism. Whorf continues: '… the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized in our minds – and this means largely by linguistic systems in our minds.' Later, he states: "This new principle of relativity holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar.' (Whorf 1956:213-4, based on Vorf 1979).  Wouldn't this mean that speakers of various languages do not look at the world with the same eyes, or, even, do not see the same world? Understandably, taken this radically, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was doomed to rebuttals both from common sense and from various fields of science and humanities (cf. Pinker 1994). Still, in its milder version, it continues to be inspiring for various comparatively-oriented and context-based studies (e.g. sociolinguistics, contrastive rhetoric, etc.).

It should be emphasized that the linguistic relativity hypothesis goes much further than the usual noting of vocabulary differences which reflect the immediate (physical and social) surroundings of different speech communities. What is more significant, more revealing and more decisive is the sphere of grammar. More precisely, it is grammatical categories and grammatical structures of a language that encode aspects of reality differently. Areas of experience that are important to cultures tend to get grammaticalized in their languages, which, in turn, determines the formation of the world view of their speakers, and, ultimately, both their group and individual behaviour. For example, Whorf's evidence from the American Indian language Hopi, which has no category of tense, indicates Hopi notion of and attitude to time, completely conceptually and practically different from the one of Western culture. Various similar grammatical examples have been objectively recorded for various languages, but  what can be questioned are the conclusions and interpretations of these language data. This line of research and thought generally meant that on the basis of linguistic data, (non-linguistic) conclusions can be made about extralinguistic phenomena. [3]

The idea of the significance of grammatical categories as the guideline for human cognition was recently revived and popularized by George Lakoff (1987) in his catchy-titled book *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things – What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. The relation between categorization, cognition and cultural beliefs may seem arbitrary, but though not direct and transparent, it can, nevertheless, be systematic and revealing. At the example of the Australian Aboriginal language Dyirbal, one of the grammatically most complex languages, Lakoff demonstrated that the allocation of nouns into four Dyurbal gender categories, which may seem random, is actually partly based on association and partly on myths and cultural beliefs of the Dyirbal people, which are different from Western ones.

Looking at the broader field of cognitive semantics of Lakoff and his circle, it should be noted that the basic notions of prototypes and conceptual metaphors have been exam-

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[3] Paradoxically, some of the fiercest opponents of linguistic relativism, the generativists, make the same methodological assumption by viewing language as the mirror of the mind in their attempt to make universal claims about human mind and nature by studying language.

ined cross-linguistically and cross-culturally as well, and found to be partly culture-specific. (Hiraga 1991, Rohrer 1991, Charters-Black and Ennis 2001, *inter al.*)

Finally, but by no means exhausting the list of relevant research on the issue of language, thought, and culture, we should also note the contribution of the Polish-born Australian linguist Anna Wierzbicka (1992, 1997). Starting from semantic analysis, she and her followers developed the 'natural semantic metalanguage' approach, based on the cross-linguistic evidence that there is a small core of basic universal meanings (semantic primes), shared by all languages, which can be either words or linguistic expressions. This common core can be used for linguistic and cultural analysis: to explicate complex and culture-specific words and grammatical constructions, and to articulate culture-specific values and attitudes (cultural scripts) in clear and translatable terms. This theory also hopes to provide a semantic foundation for universal grammar and linguistic typology and has applications especially in intercultural communication, lexicography, and language teaching.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To conclude this overview of the relationship between the study of language and the study of culture, it should be noted that, though informative in its intent, it has, nevertheless, been inevitably rather selective and far from exhaustive. Our aim was to point to the areas where the study of language and the study of culture most markedly overlap, such as language and society, language use, and language and thought, and various linguistic disciplines studying them, as well as to draw attention to some ways language reflects and determines various networks of social and cognitive relationships in the world around us.

From the perspective of ordinary language users, in their regular travellings, some suggestions and a raised awareness of how language works in the world might facilitate the journey. On the other hand, and more significantly, the paper addresses students of language and culture, and linguists and social scientists in particular, probably the most inquisitive and professionally best-equipped among the travellers in the Wonderland. The indicated pathways of possible investigation sketched by the map of this article, equally interesting and stimulating, depending on the researchers' personal academic interests and preferences, are waiting to be filled in by new road signs and lampposts of innovative findings, deeper understanding and broader knowledge.

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# PROUČAVANJE JEZIKA I KULTURE – ZEMLJA ČUDA U LINGVISTIČKOM OGLEDALU

## Biljana Mišić Ilić

*Rad ispituje međusobni uticaj jezika i kulture i šta se o određenoj kulturi može saznati proučavanjem njenog jezika. Dat je pregled odnosa proučavanja jezika i proučavanja kulture i identifikovane su neke zajedničke osnove istraživačkih interesovanja – jezik i društvo, upotreba jezika i jezik i misao, što je i ilustrovano relevantnim pojmovima, saznanjima i istraživanjima iz lingvističkih disciplina kao što su antropološka lingvistika, etnolingvistika, sociolingvistika, pragmatika, analiza diskursa, kontrastivna retorika, primenjena lingvistika i kognitivna lingvistika.*