

Farzad Sharifian, (Ed.) The Routledge Handbook of language and culture. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015. Pp. xv-522. ISBN: 978-0-415-52701-9 (hbk) ISBN: 978-1-315-79399-3 (ebk)

Abstract:

The Routledge Handbook of language and culture represents a comprehensive study on the inextricable relationship between language and culture. It is structured into seven parts and 33 chapters.

Part 1, Overview and historical background, by Farzad Sharifian, starts with an outline of the book and a synopsis of research on language and culture.

The second chapter, John Leavitt's Linguistic relativity: precursors and transformations discusses further the historical development of the concept of linguistic relativity, identifying different schools' of thought views on the relation between language and culture. He also tries to demystify some misrepresentations held towards Boas, Sapir, and Whorf' theories (pp. 24-26).

Chapter 3, Ethnosyntax, by Anna Gladkova provides an overview of research on ethnosyntax, starting from the theoretical basis laid by Sapir and Whorf and investigates the differences between a narrow sense of ethnosyntax, which focuses on cultural meanings of various grammatical structures and a broader sense, which emphasises the pragmatic and cultural norms' impact on the choice of grammatical structures.

John Leavitt presents in the fourth chapter, titled Ethnosemantics, a historical account of research on meaning across cultures, introducing three traditions, i.e. 'classical' ethnosemantics (also referred to as ethnoscience or cognitive anthropology), Boasian cultural semantics (linguistically inspired anthropology) and Neohumboldtian comparative semantics (word-field theory, or content-oriented Linguistics).

In Chapter 5, Goddard underlines the fact that ethnopragmatics investigates emic (or culture-internal) approaches to the use of different speech practices across various world languages, which accounts for the fact that there exists a connection between the cultural values or norms and the speech practices peculiar to a speech community. One of the key objectives of ethnopragmatics is to investigate 'cultural key words', i.e. words that encapsulate culturally construed concepts.

The concept of 'linguaculture' (or languaculture) is tackled in Risager's Chapter 6, Linguaculture: the language–culture nexus in transnational perspective. The author makes reference to American scholars that first introduced this notion, Paul Friedrich, who looks at language and culture as a single domain in which verbal aspects of culture are mingled with semantic meanings, and Michael Agar, for whom culture resides in language while language is loaded with culture. Risager himself brought forth a new global and transnational perspective on the concept of linguaculture, i.e. the use of language (linguistic practice) is seen as flows in people's social networks and speech communities. These flows enhance as people migrate or learn new languages, in permanent dynamics.

Lidia Tanaka's Chapter 7, Language, gender, and culture deals with research on language, gender, and culture. According to her, the language-gender relationship has been studied by researchers from various fields, including psychology, linguistics, and anthropology, who mainly consider gender as a construct that

preserves inequalities in society, with the help of language, too. Tanaka lists diachronically different approaches to language and gender, focusing on three specific ones: gender stereotyped linguistic resources, semantically, pragmatically or lexically designated language features (including register) and gender-based spoken discourse strategies (talking-time imbalances or interruptions).

In Chapter 8, *Language, culture, and context*, Istvan Kecskes delves into the relationship between language, culture, and context from a socio-cognitive perspective. The author considers culture to be a set of shared knowledge structures that encapsulate the values, norms, and customs that the members of a society have in common. According to him, both language and context are rooted in culture and carriers of it, though reflecting culture in a different way. Language encodes past experience with different contexts, whereas context reflects present experience. The author also provides relevant examples of formulaic language that demonstrate the functioning of both types of context, within the larger interplay between language, culture, and context.

Sara Miller's Chapter 9, *Language, culture, and politeness* reviews traditional approaches to politeness research, with particular attention given to 'discursive approach' to politeness. Much along the lines of the previous chapter, Miller stresses the role of context in judgements of (im)polite language, maintaining that individuals represent active agents who challenge and negotiate cultural as well as linguistic norms in actual communicative contexts.

Chapter 10, *Language, culture, and interaction*, by Peter Eglin focuses on language, culture and interaction from the perspective of the correspondence theory of meaning. According to him, abstracting language and culture from their current uses, as if they were not interdependent would not lead to an understanding of words' true meaning.

David Kronenfeld introduces in Chapter 11, *Culture and kinship language*, a review of research on culture and kinship language, starting with linguistic anthropology. He explains two formal analytic definitional systems of kinship terms: the semantic (distinctions between kin categories, i.e. father vs mother) and pragmatic (interrelations between referents of kin terms, i.e. 'nephew' = 'child of a sibling').

Chapter 12, *Cultural semiotics*, by Peeter Torop deals with the field of 'semiotics of culture', which may refer either to methodological instrument, to a whole array of methods or to a sub-discipline of general semiotics. In this last respect, it investigates cultures as a form of human symbolic activity, as well as a system of cultural languages (i.e. sign systems). Language, as "the preserver of the culture's collective experience and the reflector of its creativity" represents an essential component of cultural semiotics, being a major sign system.

Nigel Armstrong, in Chapter 13, *Culture and translation*, tackles the interrelation between language, culture, and translation, with an emphasis on the complexities entailed by translation of culturally laden aspects. In his opinion, culture has a double-sided dimension: the anthropological sense (referring to practices and traditions which characterise a community) and a narrower sense, related to artistic endeavours. However, both sides of culture permeate language at all levels.

Chapter 14, *Language, culture, and identity*, by Sandra Schecter tackles several approaches to research on language, culture, and identity: social anthropological (the limits at play in the social construction of differences between various groups of people), sociocultural (the interplay between an individual's various identities, which can be both externally and internally construed, in sociocultural contexts), participatory-relational (the manner in which individuals create their social-linguistic identities).

Patrick McConvell, in Chapter 15, *Language and culture history: the contribution of linguistic prehistory* reviews research in this field where historical linguistic evidence is exploited in the reconstruction and understanding of prehistoric cultures. He makes an account of research in linguistic prehistory, with a focus on proto- and early Indo-European cultures, on several North American language families, on Africa, Australian, and Austronesian Aboriginal languages. McConvell also underlines the importance of interdisciplinary research in this area, which greatly benefits from studies in other disciplines, such as archaeology, palaeobiology, or biological genetics.

Part four starts with Ning Yu's Chapter 16, Embodiment, culture, and language, which gives an account of theory and research on the interplay between language, culture, and body, as seen from the standpoint of Cultural Linguistics. Yu presents a survey of embodiment (in embodied cognition research) from a multidisciplinary perspective, starting with the rather universalistic Conceptual Metaphor Theory. On the other hand, Cultural Linguistics has concentrated on the role played by culture in shaping embodied language, as various cultures conceptualise body and bodily experience in different ways.

Chapter 17, Culture and language processing, by Crystal Robinson and Jeanette Altarriba deals with research in the field of how culture influence language processing, in particular in the case of bilingualism and emotion, alongside language and memory. Clearly, the linguistic and cultural character of each individual's background has to be considered as a variable in research on cognition and cognitive processing.

Frank Polzenhagen and Xiaoyan Xia, in Chapter 18, Language, culture, and prototypicality bring forth a survey of prototypicality across different disciplines, including cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology. According to them, linguistic prototypes play a critical part in social (re-)cognition, as they are socially diagnostic and function as linguistic identity markers. Moreover, individuals may develop 'culturally blended concepts' as a result of exposure to several systems of conceptual categorisation, especially in the case of L2 learning (language-contact or culture-contact situations).

In Chapter 19, Colour language, thought, and culture, Don Dedrick investigates the issue of the colour words in different languages and how these influence cognition, a question that has been addressed by researchers from various disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, cognitive psychology, or neuroscience. He cannot but observe the constant debate in this respect, and he argues that it is indeed difficult to reach consensus, as colour language occasionally reveals effects of language on thought and, at other times, it is impervious to such effects.

Chapter 20, Language, culture, and spatial cognition, by Penelope Brown concentrates on conceptualisations of space, providing a framework for thinking about and referring to objects and events, along with more abstract notions such as time, number, or kinship. She lists three frames of reference used by languages in order to refer to spatial relations, i.e. a) an 'absolute' coordinate system, like north, south, east, west; b) a 'relative' coordinate system envisaged from the body's standpoint; and c) an intrinsic, object-centred coordinate system.

Chris Sinha and Enrique Bernárdez focus on, in Chapter 21, Space, time, and space-time: metaphors, maps, and fusions, research on linguistic and cultural concepts of time and space, starting with the seminal Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which they denounce for failing to situate space-time mapping within the broader patterns of culture and world perspective. Sinha and Bernárdez further argue that although it is possible in all cultures for individuals to experience and discuss about events in terms of their duration and succession, the specific words and concepts they use to refer to temporal landmarks temporal and duration are most of the time language and culture specific.

Chapter 22, Culture and language development, by Laura Sterponi and Paul Lai provides an account of research on the interplay between culture and language acquisition. They refer to two widely accepted perspectives in this respect: a developmental mechanism inherent in human beings and a set of particular social contexts in which children are 'initiated' into the cultural meaning systems. Both perspectives define culture as "both related to the psychological make-up of the individual and to the socio-historical contexts in which s/he is born and develops".

Anna Wierzbicka presents, in Chapter 23, Language and cultural scripts discusses representations of cultural norms which are encoded in language. She contends that the system of meaning interpretation developed by herself and her colleagues, i.e. Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), may easily be used to capture and convey cultural scripts. Through NSM cross-cultural experiences can be captured in a thorough manner by using a reduced number of conceptual primes which seem to exist in all languages.

Chapter 24, Culture and emotional language, by Jean-Marc Dewaele brings forth the issue of the relationship between language, culture, and emotion, which has been researched by cultural and cognitive psychologists and applied linguists alike, although with some differences in focus. He considers that within

this context, it is important to see differences between emotion contexts in bilinguals, since these may lead to different perceptions of the self. He infers that generally, culture revolves around the experience and communication of emotions, conveyed through linguistic expression.

The fifth part starts with Chapter 25, Language and culture in sociolinguistics, by Meredith Marra, who underlines that culture is a central concept in Interactional Sociolinguistics, where language is considered as social interaction. In linguistic interaction, culture, and especially cultural differences are deemed as a cause of potential miscommunication. Mara also remarks that the paradigm change in sociolinguistics, from Interactional Sociolinguistics to social constructionism reshaped 'culture' into a more dynamic as well as less rigid concept.

Claudia Strauss' Chapter 26, Language and culture in cognitive anthropology deals with the relationship between human society and human thought/thinking. The author contends that cognitive anthropologists may be subdivided into two groups, i.e. ones that are concerned with the process of thinking (cognition-in-practice scholars), and the others focusing on the product of thinking or thoughts (concerned with shared cultural understandings). She goes on to explore how different approaches to cognitive anthropology have counted on units of language, i.e. lexical items and their meanings, along with larger chunks of discourse, as information, which may represent learned cultural schemata.

Part VI starts with Chapter 27, Language and culture in second language learning, by Claire Kramsch, in which she makes a survey of the definition of 'culture' in foreign language learning and its evolution from a component of literature and the arts to a more comprehensive purport, that of culturally appropriate use of language, along with an appropriate use of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms. According to her, in the postmodern era, communication is not only mere transmission of information, it represents construal and positioning of the self and of self-identity.

Chapter 28, Writing across cultures: 'culture' in second language writing studies, by Dwight Atkinson focuses on the usefulness of culture in second-language writing (SLW). He reviews several approaches to the issue: contrastive rhetoric (dealing with the impact of first-language patterns of text organisation on writers in a second language), or even alternate notions, like 'cosmopolitanism', 'critical multiculturalism', and hybridity, as of late native culture is becoming irrelevant or at best far less significant.

Ian Malcolm tackles, in Chapter 29, Language and culture in second dialect learning, the issue of 'standard' Englishes (e.g., Standard American English, Standard Australian English) versus minority 'non-standard' speakers of English. He deplores the fact that in US specialist literature, speaking the 'non-standard' variety of English was associated with cognitive, cultural, and linguistic insufficiency. He further refers to other specialists who have demonstrated that 'non-standard' varieties can be just as systematic and highly structured as the standard variety.

Chapter 30, Language and culture in intercultural communication, by Hans-Georg Wolf gives an account of research in intercultural education, focusing on several paradigms, i.e. the dominant one, investigating successful functioning in intercultural encounters, the minor one, exploring intercultural understanding and the 'deconstructionist, and or postmodernist'. He further examines different interpretations of the concepts associated with intercultural communication, including the functionalist school, the intercultural understanding approach and a third one, the most removed from culture, focusing on socio-political inequalities, fluidity, situationality, and negotiability.

Andy Kirkpatrick's Chapter 31, World Englishes and local cultures gives a synopsis of research paradigm from applied linguistics which investigates the development of Englishes around the world, through processes like indigenisation or nativisation of the language. Kirkpatrick discusses the ways in which new Englishes accommodate the culture of the very speech community which develops them, e.g. adopting lexical items to express to express culture-specific concepts. Speakers of new varieties could use pragmatic norms rooted in cultural values and norms of the specific new speech community which have not previously been associated with English. Moreover, they can use these new Englishes to write local literatures, often exploiting culturally preferred rhetorical norms.

Part seven starts with Chapter 32, Cultural Linguistics, by Farzad Sharifian gives an account of the

recent multidisciplinary research field of Cultural Linguistics, which explores the relationship between language and cultural cognition, particularly in the case of cultural conceptualisations. Sharifian also brings forth illustrations of how cultural conceptualisations may be linguistically encoded.

The last chapter, A future agenda for research on language and culture, by Roslyn Frank provides an appraisal of Cultural Linguistics as a prospective path for research in the field of language and culture. She states that 'Cultural Linguistics could potentially create a paradigm that "successfully melds together complementary approaches, e.g., viewing language as 'a complex adaptive system' and bringing to bear upon it concepts drawn from cognitive science such as 'distributed cognition' and 'multi-agent dynamic systems theory'." She further asserts that Cultural Linguistics has the potential to function as "a bridge that brings together researchers from a variety of fields, allowing them to focus on problems of mutual concern from a new perspective" and most likely unveil new issues (as well as solutions) which have not been evident so far.

In conclusion, the Handbook will most certainly serve as clear and coherent guidelines for scholarly thinking and further research on language and culture, and also open up new investigative vistas in each of the areas tackled.

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