IN OTHER WORDS

The Science and Psychology of
Second-Language Acquisition

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6

Culture

To *change your language you must change your life.*
—Derek Walcott, *Codicil*

"REPEAT AFTER ME, 'This is a pencil'," upon which the student dutifully responds, "This is a pencil." "Good," the teacher says in praise. Placing the pencil on his desk with deliberateness, the teacher now asks: "*Where* is the pencil?" "The pencil is *on* the table," responds the student. "Good. Now, please give me the pencil," says the teacher, gesturing. The student dutifully hands over the pencil, guessing that this might be the correct response based on what he could make out of the teacher's gestures and facial expressions.

This exchange has the ring of the familiar, controlled, tedious pace of the typical beginning English (and other language) conversation lessons. We can probably agree, uneventful as the case may be, that the student is learning a new language. But what exactly is the student learning?

On our tour through the different perspectives of second-language learning, we have scrutinized and dismantled this situation as the learning of a sequence of sounds, word meanings, and sentence constructions. We have also contemplated the value of looking to neural activities and other individual proclivities of the learner to explain what is going on. But we have set aside up to this point what is, in many ways, the essence of language—the social and cultural part of the drama. Although we have come to some important insights about language by treating it in a relative vacuum, the life of lan-

guage is rich with a variety of uses—interpersonal negotiations, storytelling, scheming, lying, signaling one's identity. As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) would warn us, the Augustinian notion of the meaning of a word as the object for which it stands "does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system" (p. 3). Rather, the meaning of a word, and of language more generally, is found in its everyday use.

To many theorists, ranging from Mikhail Bakhtin to Jerome Bruner, and from J. L. Austin to William Labov, the interpersonal and cultural displays of language—not the rules of grammar, the dictionary definitions of words, nor the pattern of neural activities—lie at the heart of the matter. Few of us, after all, learn a second language as an end in itself (save certain kinds of linguists). Mostly we learn second languages to gain access, through verbal interaction, to cultural dealings with people who lay claim to that language. As we shall argue, to learn a second language is to equip ourselves with a powerful tool to construct new culture.

To understand the limitations of the analysis of language that we have employed up to now, let us meditate on the language teacher's question: "Where is the pencil?" The point of the lesson is to teach the student how to ask questions, but what is peculiar about this question? When you think about it, the question is completely staged. In fact, it is not a question at all, because the teacher already knows the answer. What the teacher is really saying is: "Show me that you know how to answer this question."

The teacher goes on to "ask" the student: "Please give me the pencil." Here the teacher is trying to demonstrate the imperative form of English (usually at this stage it is taught that "you" is omitted and "please" makes it more polite). Outside of a classroom demonstration, this command would strike us, depending on the intonation, as anywhere from pleading to brusque, but, in either case, quite direct. It is not the way in which most requests are made. Upon closer examination we note that the linguistic form of choice for indirect imperatives in English is the question: "Have you seen the pencil?" Or, even better: "Where is the pencil?"

"Where is the pencil?"—a most versatile utterance indeed. Depend-

ing on the context it can convey a variety of intentions apart from its literal meaning. Aside from genuinely querying for information, we have already encountered two other functions that are not really questions, for example: "Show me what you know" and "Please do something for me." There are others. For example, if I exclaim it enthusiastically during a collaborative effort on a difficult item in a crossword puzzle, I can use it to announce that I know the answer. We can be so infinitely creative with our words.

It is thus not sufficient to learn just the grammatical forms of the language. There is a relationship between the forms of language and how they are used to express meanings and intentions in appropriate ways. Consider the following case of miscommunication between a native and non-native speaker of English that is based on the misinterpretation of ritual "yes-no" questions (Richards 1980, p. 418; cited in Preston 1989):

NATIVE: Hello, is Mr. Simatapung there please?
NON-NATIVE: Yes.
NATIVE: Oh . . . may I speak to him please?
NON-NATIVE: Yes.
NATIVE: Oh . . . are you Mr. Simatapung?
NON-NATIVE: This is Mr. Simatapung.

The task of the language learner is to decipher which forms are appropriate on what occasions, and many of them require cultural experience and decisions that recruit knowledge beyond the grammar of the language. But what are the properties of this cultural knowledge?

The cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1960) provides an account of the interdependence of Javanese culture and language that exposes an intricate link between religious beliefs and etiquettes that are aligned with the social order. He quotes a poem essentially stating that "if one can calm one's most inward feelings, one can build a wall around them; one will be able both to conceal them from others and to protect them from outside disturbance" (p. 241); and he uses the metaphor of "the wall" to characterize the Javanese psyche. In this culture, spiritual refinement is the balance between calming

one's inward feelings and protecting this calm from outside disturbance. Striving toward inward calm is attained through activities to strengthen mysticism, whereas protection against outside disturbance is accomplished through an elaborate form of etiquette—the building of "walls."

According to Geertz, the principles that animate the Javanese etiquette system work toward the end of building walls around the inward being to avoid disturbance, and one of these principles is the proper choice of linguistic form. Javanese etiquette allows for behaviors that many Westerners would regard as ranging from indirectness to outright misinformation, which is captured by the Javanese proverb "look north and hit south." Indeed, Geertz observes that Westerners feel that they have to justify telling lies, whereas Javanese consider it impolite to tell gratuitous truths: "The natural answer to casual questions, particularly from people you do not know very well, tends to be either a vague one ('Where are you going?'—'West') or a mildly false one; and one tells the truth in small matters only when there is some reason to do so" (p. 246). Geertz continues: "One often hears people say in praise of someone that 'one can never tell how he feels inside by how he behaves on the outside'" (p. 247). Geertz does not mean to assign negative connotations to this behavior for the etiquette here is seen as a form of politeness to put the other person at ease, much as a "white lie" is often employed in English ("you look terrific!"). As Geertz puts it, this is a kind of "emotional capital which may be invested in putting others at ease" (p. 255).

From the linguistic perspective, an elaborate choice of utterances depends on the social relationship between the speakers as well as their individual status (in terms of wealth, descent, education, occupation, age, kinship, or nationality). The simple English sentence, "Are you going to eat rice and cassava now?" has many totally different registers, for example:

Apa kowé arep mangan sega lan kaspé saiki? (low form)
Napa sampéjan adjeng neda sekul lan kaspé saniki? (middle form)
Menapa panjenengan badé dahar sekul kalijan kaspé semenika? (high form)

There are in fact six different levels of speech that reflect a delicate relationship between interlocutors. Javanese speakers are constantly alert to these levels of speech, talk about them, and actively use them in interaction. Selection of the proper linguistic level is driven by the metaphor of the wall, and it cannot be adequately understood unless it is seen in relation to the entire system of Javanese beliefs and etiquette, both linguistic and beyond. As Geertz (1960) explains:

> Politeness is something one directs toward others; one surrounds the other with a wall of behavioral formality which protects the stability of his inner life. Etiquette is a wall built around one's inner feelings, but it is, paradoxically, always a wall someone else builds, at least in part. He may choose to build such a wall for one of two reasons. He and the other person are at least approximate status equals and not intimate friends; and so he responds to the other's politeness to him with an equal politeness. Or the other is clearly his superior, in which case he will, in deference to the other's greater spiritual refinement, build him a wall without any demand or expectation that you reciprocate. (p. 255)

To use Javanese effectively, then, one needs to place oneself in the culture that conceives interpersonal situations in terms of the subtle negotiation of walls of politeness.

The aim of this chapter is to capture the cultural essence of language learning, a quite cacophonous "collection of voices" rather than the more orderly approach of earlier chapters. This shift in our expository style is deliberate, to reflect what we see as the rather unstructured and nonscientific (in the traditional sense of science) nature of the discourse in cultural studies as it pertains to second-language acquisition at the present time. To do so, we begin by explaining the relatively noncultural nature of language that we have previously described, for the exclusion of culture in our earlier accounts was no accident, and we characterize attempts to project culture onto language from the forces of sociolinguistics and cultural psychology. This discussion enables us to better define what we mean when we say that language teaching must be culturally sensitive.

LOST CULTURE AND MEANING

In chapter 2, on language, we told a rather long-winded story about the triumph of Noam Chomsky and the new cognitivism over the empiricist views of language and learning during the late 1950s and early 1960s. We demonstrated that language learning includes many complex and abstract components, but that these aspects of language remain well within the capability of second-language learners. The new cognitivism was a triumphant victory for the view of the mind as primed and ready for language learning; it was an agonizing and humiliating defeat for the vision of dogged inductivism.

It is important to appreciate, in this basic paradigm shift from empiricism to cognitivism, the widespread impact of this approach that seeks to understand and describe language and mind through the use of formal models. Such computationally explicit models of mental processes, with formal grammars as the prototype, served as a security blanket for behavioral scientists as they moved away from the observation and explanation of concrete behaviors, the safe haven of empiricism, to the murky world of abstract knowledge and mental representations. At least, they felt, if these abstractions could be described with a show of dazzling technical sophistication, then one could retain some dignity as a scientist.

The study of language, though prototypical, was not the only field to undergo the transformation from strict empiricism to a cognitivism that relied on formal models. Thus it is no accident that it was during this period that the work of Jean Piaget was rediscovered and appreciated. He had long been using abstract systems of symbolic logic as a way of representing children's changing conceptions of objects and the world. People studying decision making in adults used statistical models of probability (such as the Bayes probability theorem—given I have chest pains and a sore neck, what is the probability that I am suffering a heart attack?) to see if people acted as rational decision makers (they do not, usually failing to make a rational decision even in the face of overwhelming evidence). And cognitive psychologists of all stripes lined up to shove various kinds of computer terminology into our heads, creating analogical psycholog-

ical processes such as hardware versus software, parallel versus serial processing, and all sorts of memory configurations that now roll off the tongues of computer salespersons.

The cost of this debt, as Jerome Bruner (1990) has argued, was to skew the entire enterprise in the direction of phenomena that can be formally modeled, "a success whose technological virtuosity has cost dear" (p. 1), for very early on, emphasis began shifting "from the *construction* of meaning to the *processing* of information" (p. 5). This results in a very different view, for example, of a conversation. From an information-processing view, a conversation entails taking turns in passing on mental representations from one speaker to the other. It might as well be the contiguous joining of two separate monologues. Viewed as the construction of meaning, however, the conversation is seen as a true dialogue—fluid and dynamic in its properties, sensitive to the vagaries of context, and infinite in its range of possible variations.

Conversations, viewed in this way, are as idiosyncratic and serendipitous as each of our individual lives. Even the same conversation, if life were so kind as to offer the opportunity for a rerun, would likely have a different outcome. Who has not lost sleep, reflecting on an event of the day—an argument or a misunderstanding with a loved one—tormented by the thought: "If only I had said . . . " or "Had it only occurred to me at that time that . . . "?

But having opted instead for a computationally explicit model of cognition, researchers viewed culture as playing a passive role in human behavior. Studies of cognitive and language development conducted during the 1960s focused on whether certain hypothesized universals, such as the developmental stages in Piaget's cognitive operations or stages of language development, could be documented in exotic cultures (Cole and Scribner 1974; Slobin 1966). Research was designed to test whether these developmental stages existed despite cultural differences. During the heyday of cognitivism, culture was seen as at best a backdrop for development. In many ways, this view was quite contrary to the spirit of cultural anthropology, a discipline that found its inspiration in celebrating cultural relativity and questioning biological determinism.

But resuscitation of culture as an active player in our understanding of language and mind was not forthcoming in cultural anthropology, the most obvious candidate. During the 1960s that field was in a seriously anemic state, as captured in explicit detail in an article by Roger Keesing (1972) entitled "Paradigms Lost." Keesing observed that the field of cognitive anthropology, which had modeled itself quite forcefully and proudly after the older, pre-Chomskyan version of structural linguistics, had suddenly found itself without a model—not unlike the recent situation in communist states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In parallel with discovery procedures for language under the old empiricist model, cognitive anthropology had assumed that the meaningful codes of a culture could be induced from a limited corpus of social behaviors (Conklin 1962; Frake 1962). But as we noted in our chapter on language, these were precisely the empirically based procedures that Chomsky had ridiculed in such damning terms, charging instead that the goal of linguistics was to look for universal principles that govern linguistic competence. With the disintegration of its model linguistic paradigm, cognitive anthropology fell into deep confusion, even flirting with the idea of creating a "generative ethnography" whose goal it might be to discover "cultural competence" (Shutz 1975). These would surely qualify for future historians of knowledge as the dark days of cultural studies. As we will later reveal, cultural anthropology has since evolved from a cognitive paradigm to a more narrative framework by which to understand culture.

The Cultural Revival

Chomsky had succeeded in focusing the search for the heart of language in abstract mental structures, without paying attention to the social and cultural aspects of language use. The fact that such an aseptic view of language conflicted with our everyday uses helped maintain the focus of some scholars on these other incarnations of language. For example, even as researchers from a formalist perspective struggled to find how children might derive *wh*-questions such as "Where is the cookie?" from an underlying structure, "The cookie

is where," students who valued the social uses of language set out to inquire how these same children were learning to use formal structures in dialogue. Dell Hymes (1972) proposed the term *communicative competence* to contrast with Chomsky's grammatical competence.

In a simple and elegant demonstration, Mathilda Holzman (1972) looked at the purposes of questions used by the same mothers and children as those studied by Roger Brown (1968). She found that questions were used not only to request information, but also to make indirect requests, enable the child to display knowledge, and for purposes such as the expression of frustration illustrated in the (unanswerable) question: "How many times do I have to tell you to wipe your feet when you come in?" The child's use of questions virtually mirrored that of the mother. When Eve asked her mother, "Where my spoon?" the mother responded, "Spoon. Do you need a spoon?" and proceeded to get it for her. In this way the use of interrogative forms to express indirect requests in English is modeled by parents and learned by children early in life.

Others joined what soon came to be a chorus of claims about aspects of language that are not easily "explained" by attention to form. Among the earliest of revelers were Elizabeth Bates (1976) and Jerome Bruner (1975), eloquently arguing for the early communicative precursors of language. Bruner, for example, described routines around which mothers and children built up meanings through interactions that were quite nonlinguistic in nature, with language being more like the last note of a melody than the major theme. He describes the following sequence of episodes (the age of the child in parentheses indicates years; months):

(0;9) C holds cup to doll's mouth. Then puts cup to M's mouth who feigns drinking, this latter seven minutes after cup-to-doll episode.

(*Same session, later*) During nappy change, child holds toes up in air expecting game. M ostentatiously mouths and nibbles at C's toes. C laughs.

(0;11.) Toes game has gone on at home. M asks, while drying C

after bath, *Where are your toes?* C vocalizes and laughs and holds legs high. M nibbles C's toes as in previous episode.

(1;0) M touches postbox with face on it and mouth for slot. C plays with it. Touches own mouth, pauses. Touches M's mouth, M responding by nibbling. Touches own mouth. Then comes a long vocalization directed towards M. M says *Yes, that's a mouth.*

Bruner argued that this set of interactions between mother and child build up the meaning of *mouth* when the child eventually learns to use the word. You can use the word *mouth* only when you know what the mouth does. "The prior cognitive structure thus built up can serve," Bruner (1975) writes, "as a guide for decoding newly encountered properties of the lexicon and the grammar—as in such subject-verb constructions as *mouth bites* or *mouth drinks* and in others, such as *my mouth* or *Mummy mouth*" (pp. 16–17).

For theoretical inspiration, these early proponents of language as acts of social engagement (a "speech act") turned to philosophers of language rather than linguists: J. L. Austin (1962), who in his influential book, *How to Do Things with Words*, identified a variety of speech acts that centered around verbs that enable people to ask, request, order, beg, and so forth that caused actions in other people; Paul Grice (1975), who in his "conversational maxims" sketched out broad conditions of agreement between speakers on what should govern a conversation (one must be informative, one must tell the truth, one must be relevant); and the intellectual father of them all, the great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued that the meaning of language is not to be found in its denotative dictionary-like definitions but in its uses in everyday life. Although these theories of language did not have the computational prowess of syntactic theories, they provided a measure of legitimacy to the general view that learning language required one to be engaged in the active use of language. The child, they claimed, is not a passive black box waiting for linguistic input. In search of a deliberate contrast with Chomsky's LAD (the Language Acquisition Device), Bruner (1983) proposed the existence of a LASS (Language Acquisition Support System), which is

also needed to make the variety of language uses available to the child and to prepare the cognitive foundations upon which language is built. The prelinguistic period in early child–development demonstrates that the child actively interprets the meaning of social and verbal interactions prior to what comes later in language development, including the acquisition of syntax.

By the late 1970s, what is now the reigning orthodoxy of child–language development had been established (see, for example, Berko-Gleason 1989). The current model of language development interprets the process as an amalgam of social and cognitive factors, which includes but is not limited to the Chomskyan view of language universals. The earliest stages of language acquisition are characterized by the establishment of interaction patterns between caretaker and child that serve as the script around which language is acquired. Subsequently, the first spoken words and word combinations express intentions that emerge from this interactional context. Furthermore, the meanings expressed in this early period are products of the cognitive development of the child and are not specific to language. For example, the early word combinations include the agent of an action ("Daddy go"), possessor-possessed relationship ("Luis ice cream"), and the locations ("pencil table") and attributes of objects ("milk cold"). These semantic relations are all found independently in the analysis of Piaget's theory of intellectual, not specifically language, development (Brown 1973). Formal grammar emerges only subsequent to these social and intellectual accomplishments of the child.

The progression from the social to the intellectual to the formal grammatical characterizations of language is known as the shift from pragmatic to semantic to syntactic conceptions of language development. Under this orthodoxy, the Chomskyan approach that focused on syntax was appreciated, even congratulated, for purging behaviorist explanations of language. However, it was scolded for promulgating a static view of language and for failing to explain how meaning and intentions are exchanged in the "real" uses of language.

Given the chronological sequence of language development as the unfolding of pragmatic, then semantic, then syntactic aspects of lan-

guage, one might feel invited to speculate, as many have, that these aspects of language are related in a sequential fashion. This in turn might lead one to hypothesize a causal link between these different analyses of language. Bates (1976), for example, suggested that the syntactic notion of the subject of a sentence could be reduced to prior semantic notions of agency from which it is derived. Patricia Greenfield and Joshua Smith (1976) noted the parallels between preverbal actions, such as children placing cups inside each other, and the embedding of sentences within another; for example, in "The mouse [that ate the poison] became thirsty," "The mouse ate the poison" is embedded within "The mouse became thirsty."

Such favorite activities of those who would like to do away with syntax are at best exercises in wishful thinking. The formal relationship between these aspects of language is indeterminate and, on logical grounds, there is no reason why interactional or semantic categories would turn into syntactic ones. And even if the three linguistic stages are related—a possible analogy being the larval, caterpillar, and butterfly stages of development—there is every reason to believe that the stages themselves are self-contained. In this view, there is no reason to look at the locomotive principles of the caterpillar in order to find the airborne antics of the butterfly. Each stage is beautiful for its own sake, and one does not learn much in trying to derive one from the other.

Even though the syntactic and semantic aspects of language cannot be derived from the pragmatic aspects, the social aspects of language use are central to an understanding of second-language acquisition. Clearly, the ways in which language is used have universal aspects as well as variations across languages. The speech-act categories that were described by Austin (1967) are excellent candidates for universals—for example, in all languages, there are ways to request someone sitting next to you at a meal to pass the salt. On the other hand, it is hardly plausible that languages share in common a particular manner of expressing a speech act. To give a concrete example, although all languages enable speakers to express a need, such as having to go to the bathroom, the manner in which such needs are expressed will vary tremendously in different languages.

Reference to human excrement is indeed one of the most elaborate areas of linguistic creativity. They do not translate well. A German tourist in Florida discovered this the hard way when he found himself, somewhat intoxicated on an airplane sitting on the runway, in great need of a visit to the restroom. According to the *New York Times* (October 23, 1993) in an article entitled "Bomb Threat? No, he meant his bladder," he announced this to the flight attendant using a German expression "and then the roof explodes." The flight attendant understood this literal meaning, but not the colloquial. He was booked for attempted hijacking and spent eight months in jail before a judge was persuaded of the cross-linguistic confusion that had determined his fate. (Postscript: upon release, the Immigration and Naturalization Service took him into custody because, by this time, his tourist visa had expired.)

UNIVERSALS AND PARTICULARS

Speaking of politeness, the most ambitious and dramatic demonstration of the universality of pragmatics can be found in the work of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1978) on the expression of politeness in different languages. They investigated how English, Tamil (spoken mostly in southern India), and Tzeltal (a Mayan language) express politeness, and report a surprising amount of commonality across these unrelated languages. Although their theory is a bit involved, it is worth examining in some detail because they venture as far as anyone has dared into claiming the universality not just of the need to negotiate politeness, but also of the ways in which linguistic forms are recruited to this cause.

Their basic argument is that linguistic deviations from the maximally simple ways in which speech acts can be accomplished (for example, "Go away!" being more simple and direct than "I am in need of some privacy") come about because of the need of both parties in a conversation to minimize the loss of face. By "face," Brown and Levinson adopt Erving Goffman's definition (1967) of "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction".

(Brown and Levinson, p. 66). It is in the interest of the social order that ordinary interactions involve the maintenance of "face" of all those involved. Brown and Levinson further maintain that factors such as the relative social status and power relations between the participants in an exchange will determine the extent to which any given interaction poses a threat of losing face.

When engaged in a situation in which there is a relatively large risk of losing face but a compelling need to perform the face-threatening act, the speaker is left with choices. One approach is to attempt to elicit the action without ever specifying the request, that is, "off record" ("Damn, I'm out of cash, I forgot to go to the bank today"). This strategy is unthreatening, but risks failure to communicate intent adequately. Alternatively, one might be more direct and go "on record" as making the request ("May I borrow some money?"), although this raises the possibility of losing face.

Once "on record," the speaker may make the request baldly, in terms of a direct act (for example, "Lend me money"). Such cases are quite unusual, however, involving circumstances where both parties to the interaction would agree that saving face is of lesser consequence than the alternative of a longer and less efficient message: It is appropriate to yell "Duck!" regardless of social rank if, for example, someone is about to walk into a low, steel-barbed overhang. But most acts involve politeness that "gives face" to the addressee, meaning that the directness is cushioned using the various linguistic means that are available.

Brown and Levinson further distinguish between two kinds of "redressive" action, or acts of politeness: those acts of politeness that reinforce solidarity with the addressee and therefore minimize the threat through appeal to common group membership and reciprocality (which they call *positive politeness*); and those that work to minimize the damage through the use of deference, self-effacement, hedging, and other softeners (which they call *negative politeness*).

Positive politeness is accomplished, for example, through explicit attention to the addressee's interests, by utterances such as "You must be hungry, it's a long time since breakfast. How about some lunch?" Another example is to use in-group markers of identity, such as

two bucks then, would ya, Mac?") Yet another is to presuppose the addressee's wants and needs ("Let's have a cookie, then"), or to make the wish mutual ("Wouldn't you like a drink?") or to ... cue mate, I was keeping that seat for a friend of mine," or "Lend us

Negative politeness is much more linguistically complex, the "heart of respect behavior," as Brown and Levinson put it (p. 134). In a quite dramatic comparison of indirect ways of requesting in English and Tzeltal, they show that equivalent forms exist in the two languages for expressing indirect requests by means of the following forms:

You did not do A.
You are not (perhaps) doing A for me.
Do you want to do A?
Don't you (perhaps) want to do A?
You do A (an instruction).
It isn't done.
Isn't A (perhaps) done?
Is there permission to do A?
Can I do A?
There isn't any X.
There is a lot of X (something bad but remediable).
... isn't sufficiently warm.
... skill lacks taste.
... K, you are helping me do A.
... do A.
... good if you do A.
... would you say if I were to do A?

... o demonstrate hedges ("Perhaps I'll go to San Cristobal" mean-
... ably, will you come too?); show of pessimism ("Might you do
... w of deference ("I don't think you ought to do that, Mr. Presi-
... d apology ("I'm sure you must be very busy, but ...").
... rategy is to dilute reference to the agent causing the
... example, through the use of English passives ("It would be
... if ...") or through shared responsibility ("We at Lock-

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... heed are not excessively concerned"). Yet another strategy is to nominalize (make a noun out of a verb) the action, as can be seen in the following three ways of expressing admiration:

You performed well on the examinations and we were favorably impressed.
Your performing well on the examinations impressed us favorably.
Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favorably.

In spite of demonstrating that forms in which politeness is expressed can be translated from one language to another, even Brown and Levinson admit to eccentricities of particular languages. For example, while English and Tzeltal readily interpret questions in the form "Can you get me a beer?" to be indirect requests, Tamil does not (p. 144). Nor, as it turns out, does Japanese, even though it is a language that negotiates politeness to excess (Clancy 1986). Richard Schmidt and Jack Richards (1980) cite a study by Honda (1977) of a Japanese woman who lived in the United States for a year and did not respond to indirect requests of this sort unless they were explicitly marked by "please." Later she became aware of this interpretation, but thought that such requests were used only in interactions between sales and service personnel and their clients. Schmidt and Richards also cite a number of other cases in which indirect requests would not carry imperative force. For example, Cantonese speakers would not respond to such requests literally (yes or no); Swahili and Yiddish do not allow "Let's . . ." as a form of request.

Studies of larger units of discourse, such as the structure of narratives, compositions, and conversational style, also suggest differences among languages. Robert Kaplan (1966), for example, in a well-known paper that (for reasons shortly to become obvious) has come to be nicknamed "doodles," argued that different languages have different patterns of thought organization that are transferred across languages. English, he says, is dominantly linear in its pattern. Semitic languages make use of "parallel constructions," such as ... inclined his ear to me, therefore, I will call ... Semit-

FIGURE 6.1
Patterns of Narrative Thought in Different Languages
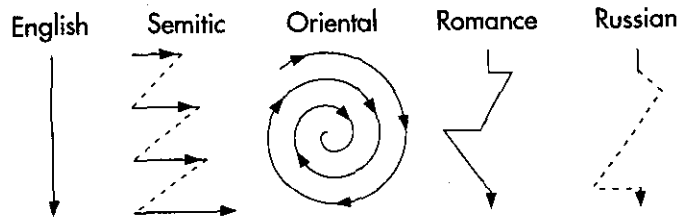
Source: From "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," by R. B. Kaplan, 1966 *Language Learning,* 16, pp. 1–20. Reprinted by permission.

(p. 7). Oriental languages are marked by "indirection," employing "a variety of tangential views" that may be said to be "turning and turning in a widening gyre" (p. 10). Romance languages he characterized as having greater freedom to digress or introduce extraneous materials. And he described Russian as demonstrating "parenthetical amplifications of structurally related subordinate elements" (p. 14). He supported his ideas with examples drawn from a large number of English compositions written by native speakers of languages representing these groups. In schematic form, he drew these differences in the form of doodles, as shown in figure 6.1.

The "doodles" paper became infamous, as Kaplan himself acknowledged twenty years later (Kaplan 1987). The controversy mostly had to do with the somewhat deterministic nature of his claims, something on the order of: if you are a native speaker of Arabic, you think in parallelisms and this thought pattern transfers across languages. And, like the expression of most stereotypes, it elicited accusations of gross generalization at the expense of oversimplification. But the robustness of Kaplan's basic observation—that rhetorical style and sequence of arguments do vary and transfer across languages—has been supported by a respectable number of studies (for example, see papers in Connor and Kaplan 1987). The persistence of Kaplan's observations is also explained by the fact that it simply agrees with the intuitions of many writing instructors who find that although a composition by a non-native speaker

may contain all the pertinent information, "it somehow seems out of focus."

In conversations, the structure of explaining, justifying, and persuading has been studied by Wai Ling Young (1982), who showed that the patterns of argument in English business conversations by native speakers of Chinese reflected their native language patterns. Young notes that a canonical Chinese argument is to initiate the discussion, present the arguments, and draw a definitive summary statement. By contrast, the canonical English form is to state the conclusion and provide supporting arguments. Subjects in her study frequently used the English "because" to mark the arguments, and then used "so" to indicate transition to their final conclusion. For example: "One thing I would like to ask. Because most of our raw materials are coming from Japan . . . this year is going up and up and uh it's not really I think an increase in price but uh we lose a lot in exchange rate and secondly I understand we've spent a lot of money in TV ads last year. So, in that case I would like to suggest here: chop half of the budget in TV ads and spend a little money on *Mad* magazine" (Young, p. 77).

Cross-cultural studies point to dramatic differences in discourse style (Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993), ranging from turn-taking behavior among Athabascans (Scollon and Scollon 1981) to mother-child discourse among Samoans (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986). Even within a language, there are different discourse patterns, as reflected in expectations about the role of children in narrative among rural American children (Heath 1983) and in the amount of pause allowed before interruption is allowed in turn taking (Tannen 1985); New Yorkers are far quicker to cut in than Southerners. The existence of variation across languages, even within languages, suggests important challenges of learning a second language that has a radically different way of engaging in discourse.

A general and robust empirical conclusion to be drawn from the evidence comparing speech acts, narrative styles, and conversational patterns across languages is that discourse reflects universal properties, as well as particulars. One can assume that, in learning a second

language, the universals do not pose difficulty, whereas particular differences do. And it would seem that discourse analysis is on its way to explaining the cultural contributions to an understanding of second-language learning.

But life at the level of theory is not so easy. To appreciate the significance of this observation for a theory of second-language acquisition, it is instructive to reflect on what we discovered at the level of grammatical rules. Recall Robert Lado's theory of contrastive analysis from our earlier chapter on language, a theory that applied best to the phonological and grammatical aspects of language. The theory of contrastive analysis asserted that differences between languages cause difficulty for the second-language learner, and, quoting Charles Fries, that "the most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner" (Lado 1957, p. 1). The flaw with this approach, as we argued, was that it compared one list (the grammatical features of the target language) with another list (those of the native language). Following the canons of inductivism, the list was not governed by any organizing principle—simply a list of readily observable differences. Although such lists serve as an interesting checklist against which difficulties in second-language acquisition might be observed (and we have found that some items work while others don't), they never amounted to anything resembling explanatory firepower. What Chomsky contributed to this discussion, which structural linguists were not able to answer very well, was the following question: What is the nature of the list of grammatical features? He showed, essentially, that such a list is constrained by abstract, universal properties of language.

Lado's approach to contrastive analysis extended to culture. While acknowledging that culture is not as well understood as grammar, in the final chapter of his book entitled "How to compare two cultures," he proceeded to list comparative differences between cultures. Thus, bullfighting has one meaning in the Spanish culture ("the triumph of art over the brute force of a bull") and another in American culture ("the slaughter of a 'defenseless' animal by an armed man"). As he put it, "When foreign visitors from areas where coffee is served very

black and very strong taste American coffee, they do not say that it is different, they say that American coffee is bad. Likewise, when Americans go abroad to countries where coffee is black and strong, they taste the coffee and do not say that it is different; they, too, say that it is bad" (p. 119). But this approach is as flawed as his descriptive lists of grammatical features in that it results in a list of differences and similarities, and does not address the nature of universals that cause cultural variation.

The nontheoretical approach to discourse analysis, exemplified by an investigator's listlike behavior, is not hard to find. Norbert Dittmar and Christiane von Stutterheim (1985), for example, consider factors involved in cross-ethnic communication between immigrant workers' from Turkey and Spain and their hosts in Germany. They describe such situations through social distance as well as dramatic differences in social status, not just in terms of ethnicity but also in occupational and educational backgrounds. They describe the immigrant workers approach to using the German language as demonstrating the following difficulties: abandoning the topic on encountering problems in expression; appeal to the authority of the German speaker by requesting a word; uses of approximations, paraphrasing, and self-corrections; high rates of signals requesting feedback ("you understand?"); and uses of the native language if the German has some understanding of it. Germans, on the other hand, accommodate by resorting to what Charles Ferguson (1971) coined "foreigner talk." The grammar and lexicon are dramatically simplified: articles and prepositions are omitted, subordinate clauses are avoided, verbs are simplified and sentences are shortened. Enunciation is slower, with exaggerated pitch and intonation contours. At times, sentences are formed using an ungrammatical word order, presumably to help the foreigner's understanding. Such descriptions, though informative at one level, do not contribute to the construction of theory. As the philosopher Richard Rorty (1982) might say, until these pieces of descriptive information can become "useful"—such as in the way we behave as scientists or as teachers and learners of a second language—they do not acquire theoretical meaning.

The study of language in its social use, in our view, has succeeded

in pointing to interesting, even very interesting, facts about commonalities and differences between languages. However, we have precious little by way of cultural theory to illuminate the course of second-language acquisition. In addition, we agree with William Frawley (1987) who, upon a thorough review of an ambitious, four-volume handbook of discourse analysis (van Dijk 1985), concluded that discourse analysis "must make an attempt to align itself more clearly with a philosophy of social mind, in order to give itself a center. . . . It is diffuse and harmfully eclectic—with no metric against which to judge either its deliberate encroachment on every other social science, or its seeming willingness to borrow any idea as long as it works" (p. 385). It needs the ability to "distinguish between the trivial and the non-trivial" (p. 362).

CONSTRUCTED MEANINGS, CONSTRUCTED CULTURES

Years ago when China was opening up to the West, one of us (KH) recalls having as an airplane seat-mate a woman from rural China who was living in Beijing. The flight, from Tokyo to New York by way of Anchorage, was a long one, and there was plenty of time to converse. The only problem was that the woman spoke Chinese (at least two dialects, that of her rural province and standard Mandarin) but her English was rudimentary even with the kindest of assessments.

Our conversation was initially stimulated when the white noise of the flight was interrupted by that familiar and unfortunately invariable phrase of the airways: "Will that be chicken or fish?" My seat-mate expressed confusion, and the stewardess, an American of European background, offered clarification by repeating the same phrase LOUDER, and with great e-nun-ci-a-tion. This evidently did not result in a successful transmission of the message, for the stewardess now interrupted my peace, asking "Does this lady speak English?" Erasing my first thought, which was that the airline had better provide training in cross-cultural communication (and no, I do not speak Chinese), I remembered at one time learning that in Hong

Kong, Chinese who do not speak a mutually intelligible dialect often communicate with each other through writing, since the Chinese written character is common. The moment seemed too good to lose. Since the Japanese writing system is an adaptation of Chinese characters (the average high-school graduate in Japan has learned about 1,500 characters, compared to 20,000 for the Chinese, written Japanese employing a mix of characters with a phonetic system), I pulled out my pen and wrote on the damp cocktail napkin the character *fish*, and then *bird* followed, lest this not be clear, with the character for *meat*. She chose fish, accompanied by a great smile of understanding.

The entertainment for the remainder of the flight was provided by the pen and a pile of napkins. The reason I know she was from a rural part of China was that I wrote *Beijing?* to which she nodded, then wrote *study* and another name that I did not recognize. Noticing that I did not recognize it, she wrote *small village*, then *10,000 people*. She was on her way to Ithaca, New York (written, of course, in the Roman alphabet), to be with her husband who was studying engineering. Her field was chemistry. We "talked" about our lives, writing, gesturing, using facial expressions. I told her what to expect in New York City, and about the beautiful gorges of Ithaca.

Thirty-thousand feet above the Pacific, we constructed this dialogue availing ourselves quite opportunistically of whatever materials we had within our grasp. At each turn, we searched for new ways of reaching for meaning, often choosing new topics and finding humor in the constraints under which we were working. We experimented, surprised ourselves with the new meanings we had accomplished, and, basically, had a great time.

The dynamic quality of dialogues—as exhibited in the jet-setting discourse just described—are frequently overlooked in analytic approaches that entail cultural comparisons. Usually, the concern is with pointing out areas of miscommunication and misunderstanding, such as the fact that Japanese have "sixteen ways to avoid saying no" (Ueda 1974). Interesting but unsatisfying for, as we noted, this leads to a list, not a coherent theory. Indeed, the universals of discourse and conversation may be found not in the static views of one cultural template contrasted with another, but in the ways in which

dialogue is constructed from all available materials. And the truth about dialogues is that they are played out in diverse conditions—differences of purpose, circumstance, opportunities for creativity, and historical background—such that a static claim about a language (for example, that English is linear) is sure to be repudiated by evidence.

As a rich, complex example of the diversity of discourse available even to a single individual, consider the following description provided by Donald Larson and William Smalley (1972) in their book on missionary fieldwork and the necessity for bilingualism:

> An elderly, dignified Mien (Yao) tribesman of Thailand, a leader in his mountain community, speaks several languages in addition to Mien, his mother tongue. Like most of the intelligent and ambitious men in his tribe, he knows some Mandarin Chinese because of his contact with traders and because his ancestors had centuries-long contact with Chinese civilization, borrowing from it into their own Mien religion and other aspects of life. He also speaks Cantonese and Hakka, two other Chinese languages not mutually intelligible with Mandarin. He can read Chinese characters aloud in Mandarin, Cantonese, or Mien.
>
> This mountain-dwelling Mien tribesman also knows some Lahu, a widely used trade language among tribal people in his area. He speaks Myang (Northern Thai), the predominant regional language of the populous valleys below his village—the language of the cities and towns where he goes to trade. He knows a little Thai, the standard language of the country in which he lives, and the language taught in the village school.
>
> But this Mien tribesman, as a member of a minority group, is considered "primitive" by more "developed" people. A Thai government official seeing him walking into town dressed in his strange costume and speaking accented Thai considers him an ignorant and inferior being. The official himself speaks no language but Thai, although he studied a little English in school. (p. 1)

This Mien tribesman may not have access to the diversity of discourses that take place in the country's official language, but he quite obviously enjoys a widely distributed range of dialogues in different languages, some for religious purposes, others for trade. He has access to literacy in some languages, but not in others. He has different levels of competence in the languages, in both the grammatical and

communicative sense. Indeed, in any of the languages he speaks, we would be quite hard pressed to find any "standard" against which his language abilities can be measured.

Capturing the array of multilingual experiences of this Mien tribesman requires more than a simple appeal to competence—even if it is modified as "communicative competence," or to a comparison of the speech acts and conversational styles of the languages involved. What is needed is a way of portraying the man and his activities at the center of circumstances, both social and historical, in which the different languages have come to be embedded.

The theory of Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist who died prematurely in 1934 after a brief but immeasurably influential career, is quite useful here. For us the most relevant feature of the theory is that Vygotsky stressed the importance of social institutions and historical circumstances in bringing together what would otherwise be disparate psychological functions. For example, although language, thought, and action are distinct psychological functions that (as far as we can read Vygostky's theory) might as well be innate, the role of society was to bring about their integration and thus make possible the creation of new levels of thinking. As Vygotsky (1978) wrote, "the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge" (p. 24). We underscore the role of social institutions in bringing about this convergence of speech and action. Indeed, Vygotsky's theory specifies that an individual's psychological processes are internalized versions of activity that occurs at the interpersonal, social level. The active engagement in Lego construction that you and your child enjoy, especially the guidance that you provide, becomes the basis for his or her later solo performance. *Inter*personal guidance becomes *intra*personal thought.

Literacy, for example, is a social institution that amplifies and changes the cognitive and linguistic functioning of individuals (Ferdman 1990). In that spirit, Vygotsky's colleague A. R. Luria (1976) conducted a study of the cognitive impact of the introduction of lit-

eracy in various rural parts of the Soviet Union. Here sociocultural events, in this case the Revolution, brought about institutional changes that had great psychological consequences for the individual. Luria's research showed that the patterns of logical thought changed with literacy, so that the process of bringing literacy to remote rural dwellers, which was part of the revolutionary agenda, transformed the thought processes of those people.

Vygotsky also wrote of distinctions between the subconscious, "spontaneous," concepts found in children and the more formal, consciously defined "scientific" concepts taught in school. The process of schooling, in his view, brings together these two types of concepts, such that they influence each other and are interrelated. Along similar lines, Vygotsky wrote of the "dialogic" relationship between development of the native language and the learning of a foreign language. The former is learned subconsciously, the latter deliberately and consciously. In a native language, spontaneous speech develops prior to any awareness of grammar, whereas, in a second language, awareness of language forms develops before any ability to use the language spontaneously. On the relationship between the two, Vygotsky (1962) observed:

> Success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language. The child can transfer to the new language the system of meanings he already possesses in his own. The reverse is also true—a foreign language facilitates mastering the higher forms of the native language. The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations. Goethe said with truth that "he who knows no foreign language does not truly know his own." (p. 110)

In this view, the sociocultural conditions bring about the dialogic relationship between the native language and the second language. The major contribution of Vygotsky's theory lies in its ability to move us away from the view of culture as a static backdrop, enabling us instead to focus on its constructive role.

In our opinion, however, Vygotsky did not go far enough. Dis-

course is not a single, generic, homogeneous event throughout society. Within a society, different discourses exist, both among members within of the same social group as well as among different social groups. Indeed, as we can imagine from a description of the Mien tribesman, even the same individual engages in a variety of different discourses. If we were to allow, as did Vygotsky, for a theory in which interpersonal activity is incorporated into intrapsychic processes, then we would need that theory to take into account the diversity of discourses that take place within a society.

Mikhail Bakhtin, a contemporary of Vygotsky who worked mostly in the field of literary criticism, helps provide us with the necessary intricacies, introducing the notion of a "heteroglossic" society comprising a multiplicity of discourses that vary in purpose and style: there is no English spoken here, but *Englishes*. There are noteworthy parallels between Vygotsky and Bakhtin, undoubtedly due in part to the Marxist context of their intellectual efforts. Whereas Vygotsky rebelled against a static view of psychological constructs, such as "thought" as a monolithic entity, and pictured these building blocks in dynamic interaction with other human capacities that are engaged through social institutions, Bakhtin rebelled against the static approach that linguists took toward language, such as the deliberate exclusion of the dialogic uses of words from their definitions. In this sense, Bakhtin was a close intellectual ally of Wittgenstein, with whom he actively corresponded. As Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984) note in their thoroughly readable treatise on Bakhtin, "the ability to use language is not defined by the mastery one acquires over the kind of knowledge of syntactic rules, word lists, or grammatical norms so beloved of linguists. Language mastery consists rather in being able to apply such fixed features in fluid situations, or in other words, in knowing not the rules but the usage of language" (p. 213).

But Bakhtin's (1986) sense of a heteroglossic society (as well as the naked form of his genius) is best appreciated by quoting at some length from his definition of a novel (the style, incidentally, suggesting that Kaplan's doodles were not altogether off the mark):

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel, each of them permits a mulitiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (pp. 262–63)

Bakhtin would indeed have approved of much of what can be found in the contemporary field of sociolinguistics, the study of the range of variability in language use that can be found in different settings, as well as in the various regional, ethnic, and social strata in society.

The field of sociolinguistics, in both its technical and substantive aspects, has attained a level of complexity that would stretch the boundaries of this book to accommodate. Fortunately, a number of excellent treatises are available that can quickly acquaint the uninitiated (for example, Fasold 1984; Labov 1972; Preston 1989; Trudgill 1974). The key message from this body of work for our purposes is that language is a powerful marker of social identity, which permeates all its structural aspects. For example, this is found at the phonological level (how New Yorkers from different social strata—Archie Bunker, Ed Koch, William Buckley, and residents of Harlem—pro-

nounce the intersection of "thirty-third and third"); the lexical level (in the use of four-letter expletives); as well as at the grammatical level (the use of double negatives, as in "I ain't got no respect"). More important, even within a single individual, the usage of different features will vary with circumstances of the discourse, the sort of diverse heteroglossic range referred to by Bakhtin. As Gumperz (1982) has noted, complex negotiations about social meaning take place in even the most ordinary conversations.

Given the heteroglossic nature of language use in cultures, and the fact that most conversations are indeed a collaborative process of creative construction, how do we interpret the typical language lesson—"*Where* is the pencil?"—with which this chapter opened? How does it contrast with the instance of "pure" interaction that took place in the airplane with the woman from Beijing? One perspective is that the second-language pedagogy that we caricatured reflects a static view of language, mostly focused on grammar. It does not enable the participants—neither teacher nor students—to use the structures at their disposal in constructive communication, again as occurred spontaneously in the airplane conversation.

A second perspective, raised by the heteroglossic nature of language use, focuses on the daunting question of *which* speech genres and social dialects to emphasize in teaching. Teachers of Japanese have to face this quite explicitly because there are grammatical differences in word forms used by different people (such as men and women) as well as in different circumstances. But even in English, for example, should colloquial forms be taught? And if so, which ones? Dennis Preston (1989) writes about a time, at a training session he was conducting for teachers of English to migrant students, when he talked about the need to teach colloquial forms, such as *hafta* and *gonna*. But strong attitudes persist about "correct" grammar. One teacher objected vehemently to this idea, claiming "I cannot teach newcomers to the language to use such barbarous pronunciation, not after a life of trying to stamp out such sloppy usage; I just can't do it. I never use such forms myself, and I don't see why incorrect forms should be taught. *I've never done it before and I'm not gonna start now*" (p. 4).

With respect to social dialects, we are reminded of the time one of us took an intensive Spanish course that met daily, taught in successive one-hour lessons by three women instructors: a Colombian, a *norteamericana* from Los Angeles, and a Spaniard. Although they all spoke the same language, Spanish, the students quickly realized that the Spaniard pronounced her *s* quite differently, registering closer to a *th*. The dialect difference quickly became an issue because this teacher was the least congenial of the three, being perceived (by her now exhausted students) as somewhat hard-edged and unsympathetic, pedantic, and generally condescending. As this teacher made her rounds, insisting that students pronounce the *s* just as she did, students were faced with tremendous conflict, with all but one student opting for the Latin American *s* (this lone student, by the end of the first week, had switched over to join the rest of her classmates). The point is that as second-language instruction departs (as it must) from the safe harbors of grammar and literature, moving into the arenas of language more defined by usage, such conflicts will become more commonplace and should be addressed in the instruction.

Yet another perspective on language use stems from the peculiar nature of classroom discourse. Cultures have developed distinct genres of conversation in the classroom. For example, the typical conversation in an American classroom is described by Hugh (Bud) Mehan (1979) as a sequence of initiation by the teacher, a response by the student, and an evaluation of that response by the teacher. The language classroom itself has its unique conversational pattern, including sequences that require repetition, responses, and the like. This specific genre, we would argue, is indeed a form of dialogue, but one—unlike most discourses that we engage in outside of the classroom—in which the collaborative construction of meaning is not encouraged. If you were to come home, sit down at the kitchen table across from your spouse, crack open a can of beer, then proceed to pull out a pencil from your pocket, place it on the table, and then utter "Where is the pencil?" your spouse would have to make some extraordinary inferences in order *not* to conclude that you have gone mad.

The culturally constructivist approach has the potential of making

language teaching truly exciting and responsive to the particulars of the learning situation. For example, one of us (KH) likes to give advice to professionals bound for Japan who ask the question: "How difficult is Japanese to learn, and how much should I worry about becoming really fluent before going there?" The advice is unconventional and inexpensive. The first part is an injection of reality. Japanese is among the most difficult languages for English speakers to learn, for both grammatical and cultural reasons. So don't set your expectations unrealistically high. Chances are that no matter how good a language learner you are, your level of Japanese will not come to exceed the level of English attained by your Japanese counterparts. The second part of the advice, a bit more practical in nature, is to learn as many *kanji* as possible. *Kanji* are the Chinese characters that comprise the heart of the Japanese writing system and hold a special cultural status. The sales pitch for learning *kanji* goes as follows: first, Japanese are very impressed when *gaijin* (as foreigners in Japan are called) know any *kanji*, which symbolizes a person's interest in learning something deep about the culture; second, the ubiquity of the *kanji* provides a readily available means for interaction with Japanese—you can start a conversation virtually anywhere by asking Japanese how to read the characters; and, third, learning *kanji* involves the simplest and most fundamental process of rote memorization and therefore can be done with flashcards (choose Hypercard if you wish), nothing fancy, no expensive gimmicks necessary. We believe that this type of highly tailored tool, with which true dialogue can be fashioned, would liven up the traditional language curriculum immensely.

From the perspective of science, however, there remains a major obstacle to the full actualization of the social constructivist theory of language and meaning. The main problem for Vygotsky's theory, kindly phrased by Rafael Diaz (1992, p. 79) as a "challenge," is that relevant supporting data are so hard to collect. The bulk of empirical work on this topic concerns private speech—how young children use overt speech, when they talk to themselves, to direct their cognitive functioning. Methodological limitations exist in part because psychology has been oriented toward individual abilities and processes

rather than broader social dynamics. In addition, the notion of applying the experimental method to manipulate culture as an independent variable is patently absurd. And, perhaps most important, the idiosyncratic and heteroglossic processes that inspire sociocultural theory are precisely what traditional statistical analysis rejects as "error variance."

On balance, the sociocultural approach is best regarded as an idea whose time has come, but which requires that new methodological canons be invented. One may well find, following in the footsteps of the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), that "the essential task of theory building . . . is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them" (p. 26). One may, indeed, find much of the inspirational work in this field now being done in areas that overlap the social sciences and literary analysis, rather than, as is traditional, in the natural sciences—for example, in the writings of James Clifford (1988) who argues that ethnographic authority is a discordant combination of narrative processes that overlap to a significant degree with literature.

We ourselves are not prepared so easily to abandon the ship of traditional empirical science, but we like the general ring of the idea of heterogeneity. Virtually all modern societies are undergoing rapid cultural change. If social and behavioral scientists do not come up with a way of conducting their work that speaks to this diversity, society will find their work to be increasingly irrelevant and difficult to support.

LANGUAGE POLICY

The United States, the largest nation of immigrants in the world, harbors a reputation as a nation of English monoglots. This reputation is probably accurate for the roughly 200 million members of the country, older than age five, who speak only English at home (according to the 1990 U.S. Census). But the census statistics also show that among individuals older than age five, there are about 32 million individuals who speak another language at home, a figure that corre-

sponds to almost 14 percent of the total U.S. population. Most of these individuals also report their ability to speak English as "well" (17.9 million) or "very well" (7.3 million), and therefore may be bilingual (although we can't be sure because these numbers are based on self-reported data). With 25 million bilingual people in this group, representing about 10 percent of the total population, is it really justified to call the United States a nation of linguistic incompetents?

To provide a sense of the diversity of languages represented in this group of bilingual people, we offer the following list of languages and their number of speakers (using Census Bureau categories that usually group a number of dialects and even distinct languages together). In 1990, there were 1,547,987 speakers of German, 213,064 speakers of Yiddish, 232,461 speakers of other West Germanic languages, 198,904 speakers of the Scandinavian languages, 388,260 speakers of Greek, 1,308,648 speakers of Italian, 1,930,404 speakers of French, 430,610 speakers of Portuguese, 17,345,064 speakers of Spanish, 723,483 speakers of Polish, 241,798 speakers of Russian, 147,902 speakers of Hungarian, 170,449 speakers of South Slavic languages, 270,863 speakers of other Slavic languages, 578,076 speakers of other Indo-European languages, 355,150 speakers of Arabic, 555,126 speakers of Indic languages, 843,251 speakers of Tagalog, 1,319,462 speakers of Chinese, 427,657 speakers of Japanese, 626,478 speakers of Korean, 127,441 speakers of Mon-Khmer, 507,069 speakers of Vietnamese, and 331,758 speakers of Native North American languages. There were an additional 1,023,614 speakers of other languages. Spanish, though a majority (55 percent), is a bare majority among the non-English languages. Virtually all languages of the world are represented. Chances are that if you are an American reading this book, if you yourself do not fit in this group, your parents or at least your grandparents would have fit into this group, unless you belong to that small majority of Americans whose roots are in England or who have recently immigrated from Canada or Australia. Then why the monolingual reputation?

One clear reason lies in the question of who is bilingual. Wallace Lambert (1975) has distinguished between two varieties of bilingual-

ism: additive and subtractive. In the additive setting, a group (for example, a particular segment of society) decides that it is advantageous to learn another language. This occurs, for example, among the English-speaking population in Canada that chooses to send its children to innovative "immersion" programs in French (Lambert and Tucker 1972). In such situations, there is no threat to the status of the native language, and bilingualism is seen as an asset. On the other hand, for most immigrant groups, there is no recognition of the native language. If anything, the native language is a social stigma. The bilingualism achieved under such circumstances is subtractive, with the second language eventually replacing the first. This phenomenon, known as *language shift,* is well documented in studies ranging from sociological treatises (Fishman 1966, 1985), explorations of psychosocial identity (Child 1943), to personal accounts (Rodriguez 1982). It is the American thing to do: immigrant parents struggle with English, their children are bilingual, and their children's children are monolingual English-speakers.

Although this model is questioned increasingly with greater geographical mobility, and certainly is not valid in "border" communities where the very concept of immigration can be questioned (for example, Rosaldo 1989), the language shift is characteristic of the American situation. Furthermore, except within their own communities, immigrants generally remain "invisible." Growth in use of the "public language" results in visibility, and the "visible" individuals in American society are English monolinguals. Although the Census Bureau may count them, immigrants do not count in the eyes of mainstream society. Their bilingualism, even if it certainly entails the ability to use two languages in the psycholinguistic sense of the word, is not valued (Valdes 1992).

The other reason for the image of the American monoglot is the truly chaotic situation of foreign-language teaching, which essentially testifies to the nation's failure to develop a spirit that supports additive bilingualism. As Senator Paul Simon (1980) notes, in spite of a repeated "call to arms" about the dismal state of foreign-language education in the country, usually associated with various perceived threats to the nation's well-being, foreign-language indica-

tors such as enrollment are grim. For example, Senator Simon noted that fewer than 4 percent of public high-school graduates have studied more than two years of a foreign language, and that fewer than 1 percent of elementary schools even offer a foreign language. Richard Lambert (1992) cites the results of a 1987 national survey that 22 percent of research universities, 13 percent of comprehensive universities, 11 percent of baccalaureate universities, and only 1 percent of two-year colleges require a foreign language for admissions, and that only 9 percent of research universities require all students to take a foreign-language course before graduation. National policy toward foreign-language education has been fragmented and incoherent at best. As Ernest Boyer (quoted in Lambert 1992, p. 2) observed, "Foreign language is not even on the national screen." But it gets worse.

It turns out that even this bleak picture applies primarily to the three languages most commonly taught in the schools: French, German, and Spanish. Ronald Walton (1992) notes that the "other" languages, which the Modern Language Association calls the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), comprise less than 1 percent of the foreign-language enrollment from kindergarten through twelfth grade, and 5 to 8 percent of college- and university-level enrollments. In spite of the rhetoric about national security needs and economic competitiveness, the two forces that have propelled national interest in foreign languages, the range of languages being taught and actually studied, are considerably off the mark. Where is Serbo-Croatian? Where is Arabic? Where is Russian? Where is Japanese?

Fans of gloom would find additional reinforcement by scrutinizing activity within the teaching of LCTLs. Eleanor Jorden, well known for her textbook on introductory Japanese that is used on most college campuses since the early 1960s, recently completed a review of the state of the teaching of Japanese (Jorden 1991). The survey found an increase in the number of programs offering Japanese. During the five years preceding the survey, for example, the number of high schools offering Japanese increased from about 200 to 770, and there were also about 90 schools offering it in the elementary and middle schools. However, a look at the staffing of these programs makes one wonder about their effectiveness. Under 40 percent of them were

staffed by native speakers, only slightly more than one-third of the teachers had ever taken a course in the structure of Japanese, and 73 percent of the non-native speakers had three years or less of formal instruction in the language. Considering the difficulty of mastering Japanese for native speakers of English, as we indicated in chapter 2, this level of teacher training would be quite far from the level of comfort required for effective teaching of Japanese.

Richard Lambert (1992) has noted that policy discussion regarding foreign languages has been dominated by a "single-minded goal of expanding the number who receive any exposure at all" (p. 15). He questions this singular emphasis and pointedly states that: "at some point a choice will have to be made between putting more national resources into providing a little bit of language instruction to as many students as possible, and directing some of those resources to lengthening the period of study for some students so that they can acquire a meaningful level of competency. Such a policy discussion has not even begun" (p. 15).

One obvious solution, as Brecht and Walton (1993) have noted, is to take steps to help maintain the variety of languages spoken natively by U. S. residents, and to make efforts to recruit such native speakers into a field of teaching LCTLs. Australia, for example, has developed a national policy on languages that explicitly encourages the maintenance of both aboriginal and immigrant languages (Lo Bianco 1987). But for the United States to engage in such a discussion about language policy, it would have to move beyond the divisive battle over multiculturalism and the assumptions that it entails. Multiculturalism, as we see it in education, is a general movement toward broader inclusiveness in the curriculum of works outside the canonical "great books" of Western culture, with an affirmative stance in representing works by, in a rough sense, non-whites and women. As evidenced by the barrage of books on this theme during the last several years (for example, Bloom 1987; Hirsch 1987; Rosaldo 1989; Schlesinger 1992), the debate is noteworthy primarily for its politics and newsworthiness. The comment by one critic of multiculturalism, Saul Bellow, captures the essence: "When the Zulus produce a Tolstoy we will read him" (quoted in Taylor 1992, p. 42).

Most of what one hears in the multiculturalism debate, for better or for worse, is couched around a zero-sum debate about what should or should not be included in the list of great books and ideas to which an "educated" member of society should be exposed. As Amy Gutmann put it, "Is Aristotle's understanding of slavery more enlightening than Frederick Douglass's? Is Aquinas's argument about civil disobedience more defensible than Martin Luther King's or John Rawls's?" (Gutmann 1982, p. 15). A variety of arguments are raised in defense of retaining or modifying the canon, but from our perspective the vital question is: What is the list for? In our view, its purpose is the construction of a collective social identity.

As brilliantly exposed by the philosopher Charles Taylor (1992), the question is one that goes back to the source of identity, morality, and religion. Jean Jacques Rousseau, for example, frequently presented the issue of morality as a problem of "following a voice of nature within us," the realization of which would result in joy and contentment, what he called *le sentiment de l'existence* (Taylor 1992, p. 29). Johann Herder's notion of individuality, that "each of us has an original way of being human" (Taylor 1992, p. 30) was also influential. Herder furthermore extended his argument to the collective person—the *Volk*, the culture—leading to a new basis for nationalism. Taylor further cites the contribution of George Herbert Mead (1934), in arguments that parallel those of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, about the dialogical nature of human character—that much of what we accomplish we do in interaction with "significant others." In Taylor's words, "We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us. . . . The monological ideal seriously underestimates the place of the dialogical in human life. . . . It forgets how our understanding of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love; how some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment" (p. 33).

The voices of immigrants (recalling the 32 million or so in the United States) are commonly excluded from the public discourse. There is irony in the fact that they possess the linguistic skills of which the mainstream sees itself in dire need. To take advantage of

these skills would require an acceptance of multiculturalism, or the creation of a new societal discourse that is more broadly inclusive. The building blocks for bilingual capacity in our society are among us since virtually all modern industrial nations make use of foreign laborers (OECD 1989). In the United States, this is documented even by that most official organ of the government, the Census Bureau. If we were to be allowed to write a law, it would say: "Build with all available materials." This is not all that different from the constructivist principle embodied in that conversation with the woman from Beijing.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
THROUGH LANGUAGE

We close this chapter with an anthropological footnote and a perspective on the meaning of bilingualism offered through poetry. They address, in two different ways, the question of dividing language from culture. The practice of such a separation crops up in a variety of fields. For example, university programs in international studies are generally administered independently from the foreign-language programs (Lambert 1990). As another example, in an interview study with managers of international operations in U.S.-based companies, Carol Fixman (1989) found that the managers articulated the importance of cross-cultural understanding in doing business internationally, but few of them considered proficiency in the foreign language to be a key element in that understanding. They generally viewed foreign-language skill as something that could be "purchased on an ad hoc basis—distinct from international experience, which must be acquired" (p. 2). In general, Fixman found that workers at the lower levels of the company needed foreign-language skills, but not those in the upper echelons. It would appear, in fact, that knowing the language may even jeopardize one's chances of promotion—something akin to the circumstances that forced many women to lie about their typing skills if they did not want to be stuck in secretarial jobs. In international corporations, there is then a rather widespread tendency to deepen the cleavage between language and culture, with language assuming the status of a technical skill.

The anthropological footnote involves Margaret Mead (1939), the grand matron of American cultural anthropology and the school of cultural (not biological) determinism. She posed the following question: When one conducts fieldwork in a new and exotic culture, how important is it to know the language of the natives? It is precisely the job of cultural anthropologists to plop themselves down in novel environments and come to grips with the essence of the culture, so they, more than any other professional category of people, should be aware of the possibilities and limits of trying to understand a culture without command of the language. Her own answer to this question was surprisingly reserved, considering that her mentor, Franz Boas (1911), had written: "We must insist that a command of the language is an indispensable means of obtaining accurate and thorough knowledge, because much information can be gained by listening to conversations of the natives and by taking part in their daily life, which, to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible" (p. 60).

Although recognizing the general importance of knowing the language, Mead outlined a variety of anthropological problems and situations that required a range of linguistic proficiency, from the need to ask questions correctly and idiomatically, to establish rapport, to give instructions, or to simply understand a situation during observation. Throughout the article, she mockingly wrote of those who seek "linguistic virtuosity" at the expense of true understanding of the culture, observing that language is a tool, "not a feather in one's cap" (p. 196). As she concluded:

It is I think a safe statement that of two individuals, one with an intimate knowledge of the local scene, the formal and casual interrelationships between individuals, the recent events of interest, and but an indifferent knowledge of the language, the other with a fine analytical knowledge of the language and a much larger vocabulary, but with a slighter knowledge of the local scene, the former will understand much more of a general conversation. Understanding the language so that the results of that understanding become usable data, involves a great deal more than linguistic virtuosity, and may be achieved with a lower degree of linguistic virtuosity than the professional linguist. (p. 204)

The anthropologist Robert Lowie (1940) reacted violently to Mead's mocking tones about "linguistic virtuosity." He argued that Mead had trivialized the important issue of use of the native language and questioned, for example, whether the ability to understand the language was more easily attained than its productive use. Lowie probably came as close as any anthropologist to promulgating professional standards for the thorough learning of the native language. Nevertheless, he admitted to the realistic difficulty in learning language to this level, and concluded that "[m]ost of us, then, not from choice but from necessity, shall have to compromise and do the next best thing: learn what we can and 'use' it. . . . We use interpreters, not because we like to, but because we have no other choice" (p. 89).

James Clifford (1988), following Bakhtin (and the sociolinguists), has noted that there are multiple discourses in society, and ethnographers strategically choose to participate in particular conversations. Obviously, some discourses are more difficult to participate in than others, and require higher levels of mastery of the language. It is the diversity of discourses that characterizes a culture; and the assumption that learning a single language gives one access to a single culture is a fallacy. Ethnographers participate in a specific range of discourses. However, the nature of language proficiency for an anthropologist is evidently not an issue that has been systematically addressed by the profession since it was debated by Mead and Lowie over a decade ago (Clifford, personal communication).

There is an epilogue to the Margaret Mead story. Shortly after her death in 1978, a relatively unknown anthropologist from Australia, Derek Freeman (1983) launched a well-publicized attack on the book that made her fame when it was first published in 1928. Mead's book, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1934), was widely considered a "crown jewel" of cultural anthropology for its findings that adolescent girls in Samoa did not seem to suffer the sexual angst found in girls of similar age in Western cultures—a tribute to cultural relativism. Freeman refutes these claims, and attributes much of Mead's error to her lack of linguistic competence. Evidently, she had allowed herself only

ten weeks of tutelage in Samoan, a language that Freeman (in touting *his* own linguistic virtuosity) describes as formidable, steeped in markings for social rank. He also described distinct conversational styles, including a penchant for teasing. Mead's informants, he concluded, were pulling her leg, unbeknownst to her due to her limited proficiency in Samoan. Freeman's critics have claimed, in response, that his own grasp of Samoan was based on his limited social interactions with Samoan society. The point here is not to pass judgment on the validity of either Mead's or Freeman's views on Samoan sexuality, but rather to underscore the complexity of language proficiency—understated and possibly taboo as the case may be—even in the professional discourse of anthropologists.

Now, to conclude with some poetry and a comment about linguistic virtuosity. The sonnet, by Pablo Neruda, is written in Spanish:

LXXVIII, from *Cien Sonetos de Amor*
Pablo Neruda

*No tengo nunca más, no tengo siempre. En la arena
la victoria dejó sus pies perdidos.
Soy un pobre hombre dispuesto a amar a sus semejantes.
No sé quién eres. Te amo. No doy, no vendo espinas.*

Alguien sabrá tal vez que no tejí coronas

*sagrientas, que combatí la burla,
y que en verdad llené la pleamar de mi alma.
Yo pagué la vileza con palomas.*

*Yo no tengo jamás porque distinto
fui, soy, seré. Y en nombre
de mi cambiante amor proclamo la pureza.*

*La muerte es sólo piedra del olvido.
Te amo, beso en tu boca la alegría.
Traigamos leña. Haremos fuego en la montaña.*

The poem has been translated in different ways, of which two are presented here.

LXXVIII, from *One Hundred Sonnets of Love*
as translated by Ben Belitt

Never, forever . . . they do not concern me. Victory
leaves a vanishing footprint in the sand.
I live, a bedeviled man, disposed, like any other,
to cherish my human affinities. Whoever you are, I love you.

The peddling and plaiting of thorns is not my concern, and many know
this. I am no weaver of bloody crowns. I fought with the frivolous
and the tide of my spirit runs full; and in sober earnest,
my detractors are paid in full with a volley of doves.

Never is no part of me; because I am with
a difference: was, and will always be so; and I speak
for the pureness of things in the name of my love's metamorphoses.

Death is the stone into which our oblivion hardens.
I love you. I kiss happiness into your lips. Let us
gather up sticks for a fire. Let us kindle a fire on the mountains.

as translated by Stephen Tapscott

I have no never-again, I have no always. In the sand
victory abandoned its footprints.
I am a poor man willing to love his fellow men.
I don't know who you are. I love you. I don't give away thorns,
  and I don't sell them.

Maybe someone will know that I didn't weave crowns
to draw blood; that I fought against mockery;
that I did fill the high tide of my soul with truth.
I repaid vileness with doves.

I have no never, because I was different—
was, am, will be. And in the name
of my ever-changing love I proclaim a purity.

Death is only a stone of oblivion.
I love you, on your lips I kiss happiness itself.
Let's gather firewood. We'll light a fire on the mountain.

Which of these is a better translation of Neruda's poem? We mean this as a rhetorical question, of course. Belitt's is more interpretive, taking greater liberty with choice of words as well as with the actual form of the poem. Tapscott's is much more literal in its translation. Both are professional translations, but they are different. If anyone believes that form of expression does not matter for meaning, let them work through the equivalences in language reflected in these poems.

Some Mexican-American high-school students in Salinas, California, were asked to comment on their preference between the two translations and thus make our point. To be fair to those readers who struggled when they studied Spanish as a foreign language, these bilingual students had been working with Aída Walqui, then a teacher at the high school who had developed an innovative course in developing the bilingual capacities of the students through translation and interpretative activities. One student wrote:

Well I chose [Tapscott's] translation because [it] keeps the meaning and the feeling of the author (Pablo Neruda). One example is that in the translation [by Belitt] the beginning [is not] romantic as the author expresses. In [Belitt's] translation the translator put some of his ideas and words he decided to change and at the same time he change the meaning of all the poem. In [Tapscott's] translation the translator tries to keep the meaning and feeling of the poem he change only some words but he keep the same feeling that the author is giving in the original copy of the poem. I chose [Tapscott's] translation because the meaning is not change from the original and never loses the feeling of the poem.

On the other hand, another student interprets meaning quite differently:

> I believe poem translation [by Belitt] is the better translation. I believe this because as I read it, I can hear the rhythm that the original has. The second translation doesn't maintain same rhythm. Translation [by Tapscott] also tries to translate word by word which would be okay in other cases but in a poem, it loses the feeling. It's better to translate the feeling than the words. Translation [by Belitt] keeps the flow with the words as shown in the first verse—"Never, forever . . . they do not concern me." Is much more flowing like the original poem—"I have no never-again, I have no always." The words used in [Belitt's translation] are much nicer also. The way the words are arranged. When it is read, it gives you more of a feeling than [Tapscott's translation] does."

Poetry is an act that attempts to capture meanings—interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cultural. These masters of bilingual virtuosity (incidentally, they would be counted among the 32 million) were able to talk about the transfer of cultural meaning across linguistic forms, and how variations in linguistic form altered these complex meanings. If these two students were to have further occasion to talk with each other about the poems, they would undoubtedly generate new meanings as a result of their dialogue. As Bakhtin observed, context is boundless even though meaning might be constrained by context and, we would add, by the linguistic and psychological factors we have explored in this book. Though perhaps not as well equipped with literary and analytic methods and terminology as those scholars who attend meetings of the Modern Language Association, these students are fully equipped, when provided with the appropriate sociocultural and educational context, to create a new level of multicultural and multilingual discourse in society.

In the final analysis, the serendipitous, often unconstrained, yet linearly dependent nature of events as they occur in culture is an important, even critical, part of the story of a second language (and of the mind). "Quirky pathways of contingent history," as Stephen Jay Gould (1989) wrote, are just as important as neurology in explaining the mind. We interpret and give meaning to these cultural events,

often using whatever available tools that, although constrained by biology, are themselves products of our culture (Clifford 1988). The exciting challenge for teachers and learners of a second language, from a cultural perspective, is to construct a context for creative and meaningful discourse by taking full advantage of the rich personal, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of all the participants.