

Cultural Models: Learning How a Language Thinks

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Abstract

This paper reviews literature on cultural models, knowledge structures shared by members of a culture, and having profound effects on speech, understanding, and the propagation of certain beliefs. After addressing the construction of these models and their relationship to schema theory, some examples of models which have negative effects on people's sense of self and cross-cultural communication are discussed. Cultural models are part of people's cognition, and thus discussion of the related notions of conceptual metaphor and thinking for speaking are useful for understanding and seeing the possibility of cultural models as part of a language curriculum. The notion of cultural models needs more attention and development, as it provides a starting point to create more equal societies and better international cooperation through language and literacy education.

Keywords: cultural models, figured worlds, literacy education, foreign language education, cross-cultural communication

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Introduction

How should culture be taught in the language classroom? When it comes to foreign language classrooms, culture instruction often takes the form of teaching about holiday traditions and snippets of the target culture's history. While learning about holidays and history is interesting, and certainly can provide some insights into understanding the people whose language is being studied, how deep can this understanding really go? Learning surface forms of a culture—especially those which may only be given any attention once a year—does not go far enough in contributing to the learner's ability to communicate in daily social interactions. Historical events may give context to the way a modern culture has developed and occasionally provide fodder for conversation, but having knowledge of some past events doesn't often help one understand why people say what they say today, or to speak more like them. I thus suggest that more attention be given to the education of underlying aspects of a culture that take the form of shared knowledge structures and go a long way in affecting native speakers' speech, behavior, and even beliefs—what are frequently called cultural models.

There are a few varying terms in the literature that will be addressed as they arise,

but I want to settle on “cultural model” as a single, overarching term for ease of discussion. It is an intuitive term, and fits well the aims of this paper, wherein the models are approached as culturally-specific phenomena, being cognitive models held by a significant portion of a single culture or social group. The different terms are not at odds with one another, as they all describe a cognitive conception of some facet of the world which is held by an individual and widely shared by their surrounding community, playing an enormous role in their understanding of the world and behavior in it (Quinn & Holland, 1987; Ungerer & Schmid, 2008).

I certainly would not claim any model to be exclusive to only one culture, or to be held and utilized in the same way by all members recognized as being part of the culture. Rather these models should be seen as cultural tendencies widespread enough to effect members' conceptions of self and others, their society, and communicative events—and powerful enough to merit our critical recognition. These models are also by no means static; in the same way that ideologies and languages themselves are always adapting and changing, so can it be expected that cultural models swell and diminish, and transform or die away, according to the people who hold them (see the later discussion of *burik-*

ko, which appears to be a cultural model currently in flux in Japanese society). As discussed by Westerholm (2009), reducing any person to a list of cultural characteristics, and assuming them to be static, entirely predictable, and unchanging is to objectify them, and thereby limits one's ability to truly understand and interact with them. But at the same time, it must be recognized that communication is effective only because interlocutors have some level of mutual understanding and cognitive similarity.

Cultural models make up the group's understanding of the way things are or the way such and such works, and while they may often be tacitly utilized in communication, they can rise to the level of awareness when met with a different conception of the world (such as through cross-cultural contact and comparison), thus creating opportunity for criticism and efforts aimed towards societal and cultural development. They make communication fluid and efficient when accessed among in-group members, but can lead to conflict in cross-cultural communication (Albert et al., 2012; Medin et al., 2006). They have the power to affect an individual's conception of self, their identity, and sense of worth (Gee, 2015; Chee, 2010); they have the power to maintain and justify the subjugation of people, and the power to change minds

and empower people (Shibamoto Smith, 2004). They can at once be individual and cultural, and while it is probable due to the situated nature of schema construction that structural differences in a particular model exist from one individual's mind to the next, it is their ability to permeate both the micro and the macro through common language use that gives them power. After a discussion of the construction of cultural models, this paper aims to present negative effects of some uncritically held models, thereby arguing for an increasing critical awareness, supported by both first and second language literacy education. I also want to suggest that the learning of cultural models is necessary for better cross-cultural communication, and that such cognitive learning is possible for second language learners, albeit ideally through direct contact with and analysis of the target language and culture.

The Construction of Cultural Models

Schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980) posits that knowledge is built of stored prior experiences, and that these schemata are then retrieved and utilized in the process of producing and understanding communicative acts. Comprehension is the result of having the correct schema,

or background knowledge, which then allows one to expect and predict meaning accurately (Goodman, 1971). A text (any linguistic production) is only like a set of directions for accessing one's schemata, it is the responsibility of a listener or reader to make meaning by first having the right knowledge, or as Gee (2015) says, by being well-qualified. A well-qualified listener shares the knowledge that a speaker presupposes them to have, and so I see the notion of shared schemata as leading into cultural models, where particular schemata construct mental models and are assumed to be shared by a significant segment of a cultural group.

Collins and Gentner (1987) investigated the construction of individual mental models by interviewing graduate students at Harvard University about the water cycle. While the participants in their studies were well-educated, they were not students of the physical sciences, and thus were by no means experts on the process water goes through at the molecular level in becoming vapor and reverting to liquid again. As such, their responses gave evidence to how individuals construct mental models in a moment of need, where a model may not already exist. Through analysis, it was determined that building and using a mental model of such a process was an act of mental simulation, where a person in-

trospectively manipulates images, but also one of analogy, which involves mapping from known domains to unknown domains in order to create a generative model that can be used to arrive at new inferences. Given their particular area of survey and the fact that participants also seemed to use knowledge gained from standardized education, they determined that the construction of mental models is also partly based on cultural transmission.

Collins and Gentner's (1987) mention of analogy and mapping naturally leads me to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal work on conceptual metaphor, and in fact, Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) set out to discuss the formation of a model of anger as stemming from metaphor. They actually seem to present a cyclical picture of give and take, where metaphors may be built on cultural models—such a model that allows for the possibility of a person being overcome by their emotions and losing control—but that cultural models also make use of metaphor. While it is thus tempting to see this as a sort of circular reasoning, I would argue that it shows that the distinction between conceptual metaphor and mental models is not really so clear, and probably at least somewhat artificial. Since they are both knowledge structures based on experience, embodiment, cultural transmission, and analogy, it seems fair to

suggest that overlap between the notions is not insignificant; maybe the mentally stored structures are actually quite similar.

Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) also discuss how metaphor and cultural models lead to classification and interpretation of experience, and how the process of analogy has effects on linguistic discourse. Although they use the term cognitive models, stressing the individual cognitive formation of these knowledge structures, it should be noted that conceptual metaphors, and thus cognitive models, are preserved and spread through social communication and thus cannot be divorced from culture as a context of social interaction. First, they state that metaphors are based on a prototypical model. While there may be many models of a particular experience, “all of the others can be characterized as minimal variants of the model that the metaphors converge on” (p. 210). If we see a person’s demeanor and judge it as meeting any variant connected to our prototypical model of anger, we thus infer that they are angry. Second, analogical processes of model formation result in metaphorical entailments, which are details carried over from the source domain. If we conceptualize anger as heated water, as is the case in English, one metaphorical entailment is the fact that heated water is seen to rise as it boils and turns into vapor. As such, we

may talk about anger rising within a person—we may even say someone is boiling with rage.

Apart from hints at the role of education in cultural transmission, and references to shared linguistic usages, both Collins and Gentner (1987) and Lakoff and Kovecses (1987) approach the formation of mental models in a way that views them as largely an individualized cognitive event. How then do such models come to be shared throughout a culture? Quinn and Holland (1987) state that work in the area of artificial intelligence and machine translation has revealed that “language cannot be understood, much less translated, without reference to a great deal of knowledge about the world” (p. 5). Gee (2015) discusses how every utterance carries assumptions about what makes a “qualified listener”—that is a speaker in the act of speaking assumes that the listener has the knowledge required to understand. Because communication is a social act and meaning is thus socially shaped, what things mean, and what sort of speech act is being engaged in—such as what constitutes a lie—becomes a cultural question (Sweetser, 1987). While some models may be based on things that can easily be learned, such as cultural proverbs, the vast amount of knowledge required for the numerous possibilities of meaning and

changes that can be effected by numerous possible situations leads me to believe that cultural models are ultimately gained along with discourses, and thus as Gee (2015) suggests, through apprenticeship and acquisition, rather than classroom learning, but that classroom instruction can certainly still play a role in awakening awareness.

The Power of Cultural Models Within a Culture

While cultural models do serve a beneficial purpose in promoting understanding between speakers from the same culture, there are some models which when uncritically accepted and perpetuated can have negative effects on both individuals and entire sections of a society.

Power Over the Self

Gee (2015) uses the terms cultural models and figured worlds interchangeably, though he does offer definitions for each, calling the first “simplified frameworks used to understand the complexities of the world,” while he describes the second as an image, a storyline, a simulation, etc., typical of one’s world of experience whereby significance is assigned to certain acts, facilitating interpretation (p. 113). He discusses an American cultural model

of success where ability plus hard work will lead one to success and prestige, and how this model is potentially at conflict with what it means to be a good family man, as more time at work means less time with one’s family. While many men involved in the research reviewed by Gee (Strauss, 1988, 1990, 1992) chose not to give up time with their family for the sake of pursuing success in their careers, they would still judge themselves according to the success model, thus considering themselves unsuccessful, which resulted in lower self-esteem. Even though these men’s claimed lack of success is due at least in part to a conflict between two pervasive cultural models, their choice of family over personal success does not take away from the model of success’s power to influence their self-worth.

A similar phenomenon has been found to occur, where a Chinese model of success can sometimes result in a lower sense of self-worth, or a failure identity. Chee (2010) introduces and critiques a model of success held by mainland Chinese students whereby attending school in Hong Kong guarantees success and prestige, which is expected to be accompanied by upward social mobility and more wealth. Hong Kong, having been ruled by the British crown for a time, and now being a major banking center and shipping port, has

gained global esteem and a more internationalized society. Their schools are widely respected in mainland China, but they are more difficult for mainland students to get into and succeed in, particularly due to their rigorous English-language requirements.

Chee (2010), through interviewing people who have moved to Hong Kong in search of better education and success, uncovered many potholes in the path to a better life. Families moving to Hong Kong often get split up due to the immigration process, sometimes being apart for years, even leading to broken marriages. While they may have been comfortable in the mainland, they frequently experience downward social mobility and struggle to find good jobs in Hong Kong. As children see the sacrifices made by their parents, their sense of obligation to succeed in school and “repay” their family becomes even heavier, and this turns into guilt if they cannot live up to their family’s expectations of academic success. The participants in Chee’s (2010) interviews all held that if one studies hard, they will succeed, but they hold this in spite of many of them being at a significant disadvantage, not being adequately prepared for the Hong Kong education system, especially in terms of their English abilities. Despite this model of success failing for so many

students, the model’s power over them is still strong—they continue to perpetuate the model in their language and behavior, even though the evidence from their own personal experience does not support it. They don’t see the problem as lying in the model, but rather in them—the model is correct, but they are the failure.

Power Over Others

The book *Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology* (Shibamoto Smith, 2004) provides a space for the discussion of the propagation and performance of cultural models of gender—especially female gender “norms”—in Japanese society. Shibamoto Smith’s (2004) chapter reviews Japanese hetero-romantic fiction to see how gender norms and attractiveness are constructed, showing that Japanese authors construct attractiveness through language use, whereas Western authors give more page space to describing the physical attractiveness and clothing of their characters. In particular, she finds that pronoun usage and sentence-final particles are especially important for conveying both being attractive and being attracted. While pronoun usage is non-preferred in Japanese in general, as people instead tend to use more titles and names, they are frequent in Japanese romance novels. This is likely

due to the language's ability to express different levels of intimacy and formality through its range of pronouns—a woman's use of *watashi* (you) when speaking to a man seems to allude to a marriage relationship, where such a pronoun may be used to refer to one's husband, and as such it can convey attraction when a single woman uses it. *Watashi* is more formal than the pronouns that a male may use in response, and so the use of pronouns asymmetrically, where more status is attributed to the male than to the female, can signal attraction while also maintaining a hierarchy of genders.

This sort of linguistic subjugation of females is described in another arena by Miller (2004) who discusses *burikko*, which is a performance of female gender and “bogus” innocence, downplaying their own sexuality (p. 149). The act often involves a higher than normal pitch of voice, a more nasalized delivery, baby-talk register, covering one's mouth when smiling or laughing, and hesitancy or indecisiveness. As these communicative practices are seen by many as not befitting an adult professional, the act of *burikko* is increasingly seen as demeaning behavior for women, but still considered a portrayal of ideal femininity by older generations, which can unfortunately result in a “damned if she does, damned if she doesn't” situation.

These examples, as well as other portrayals of “ideal” genders in media and the presentation of sexist language in dictionaries (Endo, 2004), results in what Nakamura (2004) calls symbolic domination, which uses people's language and literacy to engage in “ideological control at the macrosocietal level” (p. 132). By portraying and/or supporting an ideal where women's subordination to men is “normal”, women are disadvantaged and their identities are limited.

Effects on Cross-Cultural Communication

In light of the close relationship between mental models and conceptual metaphor, as discussed previously, it is reasonable to suggest that there may exist some universals, as some have argued for conceptual metaphor theory (Diaz-Vera, 2014; Lantolf & Bobrova, 2014; Trim, 2014). But as the term “cultural model” implies, there is an expectation of difference from one group of people to another. As the studies reviewed above have shown, differing cultural models can result in conflict within an individual and within a culture, but now I want to take a broader perspective to view their effects on cross-cultural communication. Clammer, et al. (2004) state that “differing conceptions of being-

in-the-world necessarily enter into conflicts between systems (societies and cultures) based on different ontological premises” (p. 4). Given that few if any cultures live in isolation, particularly in our increasingly interwoven world, such conflict of models is to be expected.

Keller and Loewenstein (2011) use the term cultural category, which judging by their handling of the notion, takes a more semantically-situated stance than other writers reviewed here. Based on their choice to use the word “category”, it may be suggested that they view words in a language metaphorically as containers that hold ideas (and behaviors), thereby affecting understanding of these words, understandings which may vary from culture to culture even where two words of two different languages may be widely accepted as good translations of each other. To uncover variations in meanings contained in apparently similar notions, they gathered a set of 17 situation types involving “cooperation” drawn from English and Chinese research articles, which they then used to construct a questionnaire that was given to 200 university students in China and 200 university students in the United States. The goal was to determine whether there may be a difference in cultural models of cooperation between the two countries. While there were mostly similar patterns,

showing a multicultural consensus, they reported significant difference in ideas about competition and helping as they relate to cooperation. American participants see cooperation as not involving competition, while Chinese participants seemed to have an opposite opinion—that some level of competition can be cooperative. In terms of helping, the more one helps in America, the more they are seen as cooperative, whereas in China only a moderate level of help is seen as cooperative. While Keller and Loewenstein (2011) did not state exactly what “competition” and “helping” were portrayed as in their questionnaire—they are likely cultural categories in need of exploration themselves—the differences that their study revealed may be important for ensuring effective communication and cooperation without conflict between the people of China and the U.S., whether in a workplace or on the international stage.

The Need for Cultural and Cognitive Learning

Translating People

Cultural learning brings understanding of others, it increases communicative competence and language proficiency (Moran, 2001). Part of good communication is being a qualified interlocutor, one who can

understand what is meant, and who knows how to know in the given cultural context. Cultural models are representations in the mind of an interlocutor, guiding them towards certain expectations and interpretations; they “are used to read signaled intentions, attitudes, emotions, and social context, including the social status of those one is encountering” (Bennardo & De Munck, 2014, p.3). Where certain signals and expectations may differ from one culture to the next, there is an epistemological gap, and thus a possibility for misunderstanding. Crossing these gaps is, in a sense, becoming a translated person, capable of shifting their epistemological stance and perceiving from another’s perspective (Westerholm, 2009). Luria and Vygotsky (1992), seeing language as a mediator of thought and experience, suggested that the way words are used differently by different communities has a strong effect on the mental operations performed with a word. It is this interconnectedness of social use and mental representation that erases the line between language and culture (and indeed cognitive processes) and led Agar (1994) to argue for a reconceptualization, thus coining the term *languaculture*, wherein the two are fused into one. The learner, then, must experience some level of mental and cultural transformation in order to understand and communicate ef-

fectively with native speakers of their target language.

This naturally brings up the issue of a possible shift in one’s very identity when becoming multilingual, and a fear that something of one’s original culture and identity may be lost. In fact, there is such a fear worldwide—for minority communities in particular—as the world becomes more globalized, and more people learn global languages, especially English. Sun (2009) addresses this issue in regards to translation and cross-cultural communication in his discussion on *glocalization* (Roudometof, 2016), a process whereby the global and local come into contact, sometimes vying against each other for space as the local revolts in fear of cultural homogenization, but oftentimes resulting in cultural hybridity of both individuals and multinational corporations—the local becomes more global and the global becomes more local. The two interact to ensure mutual survival: McDonald’s coming to China didn’t erase away Chinese food culture, rather they started serving sweet red-bean pies in place of the original apple pies—the global thus accepts some level of localization. Something similar happens in an individual, where a person finds themselves in between cultures, what Bhabha (1994) calls *inhabiting an intervening space*, being beyond either culture. It is at

this borderline where ‘foreign’ ideas give birth to previously unrecognized needs, and through interaction with an ‘other’ the self is more clearly known. A person will certainly change through authentic interaction with other cultures and languages, but change does not need to be loss, rather it should be a process of discovery and growth.

This interaction and acceptance among people is an important key to good communication, as Sun (2009) says, “without necessary local knowledge, translation is devoid of an interpretive framework... knowledge of the target culture is a prerequisite for cross-cultural communication” (p. 97). Localizing to the point of a loss of otherness is not authentic communication, and globalizing to the point of homogenization may result in a loss of cultural possibilities; a balance should be carefully sought by both learners and educational professionals.

The ultimate goal in improving communication across cultures is to encourage cooperation and avoid preventable conflicts. Sadri and Flammia (2011) point out that many conflicts between different ethnic groups have long histories where there has been struggle over territory and resources, and sometimes religious or ideological differences. They suggest that through communication, we can identify common

values and minimize conflict. An additional benefit to such contact with difference is that it leads people to know themselves better, and to see other possibilities when they understand their cultural practices and preferences are not the only way, and may not be the best way. The ability to engage with others can also give rise to and help to ensure success in new work opportunities, as the global economic system “can best be characterized as an international system of economic interdependence whereby many countries have come together to transact or engage in ‘business beyond borders’” (Sookanan, 2011).

Cognition, Culture, and Communication

Theorizing culture is a notoriously complicated and difficult task, one which is not within the scope of this paper, but while commonly seen first as something outwardly visible, it is important to note that it is also deeply internal and cognitive. Bennardo & De Munck (2014) describe a shift that has been occurring in anthropological studies since the 1960s, when a direct link was made between content (symbols, feeling, ideas, values, belief), and locus (the mind). This shift led researchers away from a focus on the outward behaviors and products of a culture, and into the deeper mental structures. D’Andrade

(2001) appears to carry this to an extreme when he writes, “The ideas and knowledge needed to put on an initiation ceremony are culture, but the actual activities of the initiation ceremony are not culture and neither are the masks and ritual paraphernalia” (p. 243). At the same time, though, he states that culture is not purely mental, and should not be viewed as such, as it fuses with the physical in several ways, including the medium of communication; the Saussurian tie between the sign (linguistic), signified (conceptual), and referent (physical); and conventional externalization of culture in stories, movies, or roles. Ultimately, the dilemma is well summarized by Shore (1996): “...the locus of culture [is] inherently ambiguous and [can] not be adequately characterized in exclusively psychological or social terms” (p. 51).

While researchers in linguistics and cognition are in search of universals, elements that can be said to exist in the mind of every human being, thus giving evidence to the search for a single, biologically inherited system, they also must allow for differences across cultures. Lakoff & Johnson (1980), in their seminal work on conceptual metaphor—a major landmark in the study of cognition—had to account for culture as a place where values and ways of conceptualizing collect and systematically interact: “The most funda-

mental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (p. 465). The metaphorical constructs that people use to talk and think allow certain details to be more prominent, while filtering others away; while there may be metaphors shared between cultures, different metaphors may be given more prominence in different cultures.

Lv & Zhang’s (2013) comparison of metaphors for love between English and Chinese can offer some examples for thought. They point out LOVE IS FATE as a typical conceptual metaphor in Chinese that may lead Chinese people to tend to show love indirectly and implicitly. While one can’t claim a right or wrong way for expressing love, English speakers may give more weight to metaphors like LOVE IS A PLANT or LOVE IS A COMMODITY, likely leading them to see more overt action as a necessary part of a love relationship—a plant must regularly be cared for, and commodities must be earned or gained by trading something else of value. It is thus easy to imagine a scenario where two people of different cultures misunderstand, or completely miss, another’s expression of love.

Research in the areas of thinking for speaking (Slobin 1996, 2003) and gestures has revealed that the learning of grammar

and vocabulary alone is not enough for coming to use a second language as it is used by native speakers; but rather, there is evidence that underlying mental representations from a learner's first language (L1) can persist into their use of their second language (L2), even at intermediate to advanced levels of fluency. Stam's (2006, 2015) work examines the use of gestures by native Mexican Spanish speakers, native English speakers, and learners of English from a Mexican Spanish L1. The differences in use of gesture between these two languages reflect differences of expressing path and motion:

“In Spanish, path is expressed linguistically through clauses, i.e., separate verbs, and gesturally through path gestures primarily on verbs. In English, on the other hand, path is expressed linguistically through satellites and the accumulation of path components within a single clause, and gesturally through path gestures on satellites, verbs + satellites, ground noun phrases, and verbs as well as by the accumulation of path gestures within a single clause” (Stam, 2006, p. 164).

Stam's (2006) observations of participants' use of gestures in retelling an action-filled narrative both corroborated

the work of other researchers' discussion of thinking for speaking differences between speakers of Spanish and speakers of English (Talmy 1985, 1991, 2001; Slobin, 1996; Berman & Slobin 1994; Slobin & Hoiting 1994), and found that the ten English learners participating in the study had gestural practices from their L1 that persisted into their English speaking, practices that were different from those of the native English speakers. While it appears that learners can reach a point of receptivity, and begin learning the thought and thus gestural patterns of their L2, participants in Stam's study were found to be “not yet aware that English has a different pattern of thinking for speaking about motion from their native language” (Stam, 2006 p. 166).

Teaching and Learning Cultural Models

As a goal of this paper is to make the case for the value of teaching and learning cultural models in first and second language literacy courses, a reasonable question would be how cognitive structures and ways of conceptualizing can be taught, indeed if they can be taught at all. In regards to thinking for speaking and its manifestation in co-speech gestures, just discussed above, there is forthcoming evidence from

Stam, Lantolf, Urbanski, and Smotrova that even short term instruction can result in changes, where speech-gestural pairings become closer to that of native speakers of the target language, possibly indicative of a change in mental representation (K. Urbanski, personal communication, October 14, 2020).

In the area of conceptual metaphor, Lantolf and Bobrova (2014) argued for metaphor becoming part of second language curriculums, suggesting attention be drawn to source domains from which the details of metaphorical expressions originate, and recommending the creation and use of metaphor dictionaries in the classroom. Li (2010) has made a similar push, arguing that metaphor gain recognition particularly in the area of teaching second language idioms.

Much of the filtering or embellishing of perception that occurs through metaphorical entailments occurs below the plane of awareness, but it is important for our cause to also point out the power of individual agency in utilizing metaphor. This is highlighted well by Qian Zhongshu, a late Chinese literary scholar of much acclaim, and his theory of metaphor. He sees metaphor as having “many sides,” comparable to a notion which Goatly (1997) called multivalency, where the same source may be

used for many different targets, and the metaphorical entailments accessed may vary accordingly. Ding (2005) gives the example of the source MOON in Chinese, where the word 月眼 (MOON-EYES) makes use of the moon’s brightness to describe the target, eyes; and the word 月面 (MOON-FACE) utilizes the moon’s roundness to describe the target; a human face. He continues to show how in Chinese culture and literature the moon can also represent yin, a cosmic energy opposite to yang. From these examples, we can see that “a single thing may be viewed from different perspectives and will appear differently in each. When a writer uses a metaphor, he takes what he wants from it” (Qian, 1998, p. 127). Qian thus highlights the agency of an individual to use metaphor for their own expressive needs, showing that we are not merely subject to our cognitive processes, but that through a raised awareness an individual can guide their own conceptualization.

This guiding and altering of conceptualization has also found success in the second language classroom, particularly in the teaching of metaphors (Canziani, 2016; Wang, 2017). And while all of this does give hope, there appears to be a large gap in the research when it comes to teaching cultural models. A recent paper by Ma

(2020) makes a similar argument to the one made here, that cultural models should be made a part of the L2 curriculum, specifically part of English language courses in China, but there is no evidence given as to the effectiveness of cultural model instruction. The strategies of instruction listed by Ma aren't given any explanation and the example lesson focuses on the use of chopsticks in China compared to the use of silverware in the West, examining only surface-level products and practices; it is only an introduction of difference, which learned apart from a deeper cognitive context likely leads only to further distance by way of othering the target culture.

Foreign language educators should instead seek deeper, more meaningful examples that lead their students to gain a new perspective on some aspect of the human experience, especially those which are directly applicable to communicative events, such as the treatment of people: What does respect look like? What does a person who deserves respect look like? What makes someone a friend? For deeper understanding of the people of a culture, what values are important to them and how do their actions substantiate those values? What drives them to do what they do every day—are they pursuing a model of individual success, of family pride and filial piety, or of national progress and good citizen-

ship? What is a good citizen? The models found in the answers to these questions—and the many more that could be asked—may be as difficult to teach well as they are to even identify. Many teachers may object, saying that they themselves don't have the cultural knowledge needed to teach this way, or have not been trained in the methods of ethnography or discourse analysis needed to identify cultural models in the first place. There is yet another issue that cultural models, like language and culture, change with time, and may differ across sub-groups within any recognized culture. They “are of necessity flexible, fluid, and capable of alternative interpretations in order that they can be used in a variety of different situations and among a variety of different people with slightly different perspectives” (Bennardo & De Munck, 2014, p. 4).

Given this complexity, I suggest that education of cultural models begin first where Canziani's (2016) metaphor teaching began, that is with generating awareness. Learners first need to know what cultural models are, and be given some examples (Bennardo & De Munck, 2014, give a good review of cultural models generally found in major cultures around the globe). From here, and once they have some understanding of the complexity of culture, they can be trained to learn culture

and identify potential cultural models autonomously, through interaction with members of the target culture, by becoming junior ethnographers and linguists. Journaling and recording experiences that stood out as odd or interesting can give learners a chance to reflect and think more about the greater context of the experience—if it seems odd, then what sort of logic would be needed for it to make sense? As an example, I remember my first time being guided through a mass of metal panels in a Guangzhou metro, feeling dehumanized as my experience growing up in Kansas connected such paneled and controlled walkways to corrals (a system of pens used for the sorting and holding of cattle). Once this “oddity” was placed in the context of a crowded rush hour, I understood the necessity of the panels, and appreciated the resulting efficiency of guiding such crowds through the metro station. Students could be encouraged to carry out informal surveys: when they suspect a model of cultural importance, they can ask natives directly, but not just once, they can ask multiple people to get a broader idea and to see where culture-wide tendencies and individual differences interact. In this way learners can at once observe and participate, learn and practice. Thus, the classroom becomes a place of initiation and skill acquisition,

while the real learning of culture basically looks like simplified anthropological fieldwork.

Equipping language learners to interact with a culture at the cognitive level has the aim of increasing their cultural and communicative competency, and ultimately may lead them to reflect on their own culture and who they are, but why teach cultural models in a first language literacy course? Even in an L1 classroom, learners can gain a greater awareness of their own culture, and come to an understanding that ways of thinking can be conventionalized through social interaction, and conventionalized differently in different groups having differing historical experiences. This can help to assuage ethnocentric ideas, leading to a greater potential for intercultural competence, thus being a better global citizen. It can also give them a new perspective from which to view their own culture, no longer taking what is conventional for granted as “normal”, but rather taking a more critical eye, to see the true qualities of their culture, and to see where it could be better.

Implications and Conclusion

The power of cultural models, whether over individual identities or cross-cultural communication and conflict, is something

that deserves more research and discussion. Literacy and language education should address cultural models where they are apt to lead to miscommunications and conflict, or where they preserve inequities in a society. It is certainly no small task, but is quite necessary, then, that such relevant cultural models are identified. Because so much can be involved in or called a “cultural model”, from a model of a single word to a model of an entire sector of a society, there is perhaps also a need for more specific levels of models and terminology—a taxonomy of mental models. The differences between extant terms need to be better explicated, and more need to be created, as terminology is a toolkit for identifying and revealing cultural models at different levels that may

currently still be operating below speakers’ level of awareness.

Where cultural models result in societal inequities or deliver the opposite of what people believe, a critical awareness is vital. While identifying such models is an ongoing task of anthropologists and linguists, I suggest that spreading awareness is something that can happen in literacy education, where the focus is already to train students to read and understand language. Where cross-cultural communication and cooperation may be hindered by conflicting models, the second language classroom can provide a starting point to open students’ eyes to differences and the reasons behind them, thus preparing them to better navigate our multicultural world.

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