

## The Linguaculture Classroom—Cognitive Shock and the Expanding Self

### **Naïve learners**

Monolinguals frequently have a naïve understanding of foreign language learning. A monolingual American recently said to me, upon hearing that I live in Japan, “Listen! I speak Japanese! *Konnichi-wa!*” That was, however, the only Japanese this person knew. It seems that for this person, “speaking a language” meant the ability to produce foreign words. Such a simplistic view is not rare. It is also reflected in comments such as “Oh, you live in Japan? So I guess you speak the language.”—as though going abroad automatically confers foreign language ability. Such naiveté is understandable, of course. Language learning is a typically a long, involved often frustrating process. Monolinguals don’t “get” language learning. . How could they? They haven’t been through it.

There is a parallel to such linguistic ignorance. Those with little intercultural experience typically have a stereotypical or simplistic understanding of foreign people and cultures. We find evidence for this when well-meaning people make naïve statements to foreigners that they meet. My wife reports that countless times in North America she heard comments such as “Oh, you’re from Japan? My brother drives a Nissan.” Naïve comments are also found among inexperienced tourists who marvel about

things that are “quaint” or “different” abroad. Less experienced sojourners tend to focus on the most superficial differences—temples and food—without fully grasping just how deep cultural difference can be. This is also why it’s easy get caught off guard by culture shock when living abroad for the first time. Unless you’ve been through the process before, you can’t really imagine what’s involved.

From the phenomenological perspective—one that is focused on how something is experienced—there are important parallels between the ignorance of inexperienced language learners and the cultural naiveté of those with few foreign experiences. Both language learning and foreign experiences involve cognitive adjustments to parts of the self that are normally automatic and unconscious. Our native language is natural to us and learning a foreign language disrupts our normal way of communicating. This forces us to become aware of language in a new way. Likewise, after spending time in a foreign environment, we gain a new perspective on our home community. Both language learning and foreign experiences do more than give us new information about the world. They change the way we perceive things.

There’s another phenomenological parallel between language and culture learning. They both have the potential to be transformational. The language learning process often affects our identity—in some way we become a new person, or at least find new avenues of expressing ourselves. We don’t simply “learn Russian” we “become a Russian speaker” and gain a uniquely Russian perspective on communication. Likewise, foreign experiences can also touch us deeply, helping to “open our eyes to the world” or “expand our horizons”. This transformational process may be hard to understand for someone who has never experienced these things.

For language teachers, the parallels between language and culture learning are important. Linguistic competence goes hand in glove with cultural competence. The capacity to form grammatical sentences does not automatically confer cultural and sociolinguistic competence. Mastering a foreign language requires an understanding of its use in the real world. It’s not possible to go to a foreign country and *only* practice the language, since

using a foreign language in real life involves a concurrent process of *cultural learning*—adjusting oneself to the demands of a foreign environment. Even learners of English as a lingua franca, one with no clear “target culture”, must grapple with the complexities of using English with foreigners in foreign situations. In real life, foreign language practice is almost always accompanied by cultural learning as well. Because of this, language classes that focus only on the mechanics of language risk launching learners into foreign situations unprepared.

### **Integrating language and culture learning**

Many teachers understand, intuitively at least, that cultural learning and language learning are related. There is a tendency, however, to think of culture as additional *content*, something “extra” to add into the language learning curriculum—a bit of “spice” to make classes more interesting. This is particularly true for teachers who think of the foreign language as knowledge that has to be put, piece-by-piece, into the minds of students. This treats language learning as an additive process involving a step-by-step accumulation of knowledge and skills. This view of language doesn’t leave much room for culture, since getting students to retain the material being taught is hard enough.

Even teachers who see language learning in a more contextualized way may struggle to incorporate cultural learning into their classrooms. For starters, it’s hard to know what the learning goals would be. It’s hard to reduce cultural knowledge to a set of rules or facts. Because of this, cultural learning goals that have been proposed tend to be vague or broadly defined. Mike Byram, perhaps the most widely published scholar in this area, proposes, for example, five *saviors* of intercultural competence, including: 1) knowledge of self and other, 2) critical cultural awareness, 3) relativizing self and valuing others, 4) the skill of interpreting and relating, and 5) the skill of discovering and interacting. (Byram 1997; Byram, Nichols et al. 2001) Adriana Raquel Diaz proposes *perspective transformation* and *reflectivity* as important cultural learning outcomes. (Diaz 2013) Such disparate and abstract learning goals are not easy to apply in the classroom. Even

specialists have trouble, agreeing in principle that an integrated approach to language and culture learning is desirable<sup>1</sup>, yet providing only limited advice on how to go about it. As Adriana Raquel Diaz states, “(The) gap between theory and practice in language and culture pedagogy . . . continues to mystify theorists and practitioners.”<sup>2</sup>

All of this creates quite an impasse. Language teachers, by and large, understand that language learning and cultural learning should, ideally, go hand in hand. They almost certainly don’t look at language learning in the naïve way that inexperienced learners often do. And they likely know first hand the transformative potential of foreign experiences, and, hope to open learners’ eyes to those possibilities. In spite of this, it can be very difficult to connect day-to-day language teaching to these broader, deeper learning objectives. How, then, can this gap be bridged?

### **The Phenomenological Approach to Linguaculture**

In this chapter, I will present a way of thinking about this challenge—the Phenomenological Approach to Linguaculture (PAL). My goal is to provide language teachers with a straightforward, yet theoretically sound, way to integrate language and culture learning in the classroom. As we will see, the term “linguaculture” represents the view that language and culture learning are, from the neurocognitive perspective, part of a single process, and thus should be considered together. PAL is not a set of techniques, but a way of conceptualizing language and cultural learning. It is a *phenomenological* model in which the learner’s experience is of central concern. It asks the question: *What is the learner’s relationship with the foreign language and with foreign cultures? Is it perceived as something alien and foreign, or as something natural and integral to the self?* It assumes that this relationship changes over time as learners reach higher levels of ability. This process is seen as *developmental*—one that passes through a series of stages or levels.

PAL is also concerned with the question: *What is the learners’ view of their own learning process?* At lower levels, for example, learners tend to have a more simplistic view of the learning process, assuming, for example,

that it primarily involves remembering words—a sort of information acquisition view. At higher levels, learners often start to see that language learning entails not only remembering information, but putting linguistic patterns to use creatively, and ultimately to focusing not on the mechanics of language, but on communicative content. Unfortunately, however, not all learners make the transition to this more complex understanding, and may remain “stuck” with an overly simplistic view that may hinder their progress. It’s not uncommon to find learners who have studied for years, who struggle to use the language fluently, yet seem to focus only on the idea of learning more vocabulary as a way of improving. PAL assumes, on the other hand, that learners at different developmental levels have different learning needs, and that both teachers and learners need to be aware of the differences.

PAL also attempts to move beyond the idea that culture is extra content to be *added* to language learning. An additive approach typically involves teaching *about* culture in some way. PAL focuses instead on *doing* cultural learning. This means that even when course content is focused primarily on linguistic practice, that practice is seen in terms of integrating foreign elements into the cognitive systems of learners—new ways of thinking and acting. Foreign languages are, after all, *foreign*—they are not easily integrated into existing cognitive structures. If we see cultural learning broadly as the process of learning from foreign experiences, then *language learning itself can be seen as a form of cultural learning*.

The learner’s reaction to foreignness is at the center of PAL. As we’ll see, this has important implications for teaching practice. To give one small example, student nervousness is sometimes seen as a barrier to learning—teachers tell students “Be confident!” or “Don’t worry about making mistakes!” PAL, on the other hand, sees nervousness as a natural part of the linguaculture learning process—it reflects the need for learners to adjust and expand their sense of self. Learners can respond to these demands by either resisting foreign patterns, or working at integrating them into their minds. Language learning is much more than the acquisition of knowledge or skills—it’s an adaptive challenge imposed on our cognitive

systems.

### **Theoretical foundations of PAL**

PAL takes as its theoretical starting point a dynamic systems view of language and culture—one that seeks to be consistent with an understanding of how the brain works. While language and culture learning can, and frequently are, conceptualized as separate, PAL proposes that from the neurocognitive perspective, it is artificial to do so. This view assumes that *foreign language learning is difficult for many of the same reasons that intercultural experiences are powerful*. Both involve creating and integrating new dynamic systems of meaning into our cognitive architecture. This process is disruptive, since our brains have already been configured with existing linguistic and cultural schema. For example, PAL proposes that *the nervousness and resistance the learners may feel while practicing a foreign language is fundamentally similar to the psychological stresses of culture shock*. Language and culture learning both involve a potential *cognitive shock* as we attempt to reconfigure our mental processes.

PAL proposes that language and culture learning involves not only a process of acquiring new skills, but also a reconfiguration and expansion of the psychological territory of self. This is seen as involving four distinct levels. At level i-1, the foreign language and culture are experienced as facts and information; at i-2 as something more systematic and rule based; at i-3 patterns are integrated enough for the learner to focus on meaning and apply knowledge systematically; at i-4 learners start to gain a meta-understanding of language and cultural learning. The “i” stands for “identity”. The strain of this adjustment challenge may be experienced negatively as nervousness and resistance. The rewards of such learning are equally powerful, and can include an eye-opening sense of discovery, and an expanded sense of self, and intercultural insight.

Despite theoretical foundations originating in an understanding of biological processes, PAL is fundamentally a humanistic approach, focusing on growth and development instead of purely behavioral outcomes. Success is measured not simply by what you can *do* in a foreign language, but by the

kind of person you can *be* and *become*. It's not unusual to meet learners who study for years, and who may be quite capable communicators, who feel hesitant or insecure as foreign language speakers. This is a reminder that increased knowledge and skills *do not* automatically change the way we experience a foreign language, or the self that we become when using that foreign language. Many look at this in psychological terms, as indicating a lack of confidence or as a sign of insecurity. PAL, on the other hand, sees this evolving experience of self as part of a critical process of psychological adjustment, one that needs to be reflected on and understood.

### **Linguaculture as dynamic systems of meaning**

Linguistic and cultural knowledge is not static. Within the brain, linguistic and cultural competencies exist as dynamic systems of embodied knowledge. The “simple” act of remembering a single word involves the rekindling of complex neural networks—an active process of recreation. Lexical items in our brain are not stored in lists with definitions, as with a dictionary. Linguistic knowledge is more like an extensively networked and cross-referenced encyclopedia, interconnected by topic and association. Likewise, grammatical competency does not consist of rules that we follow when making sentences. It involves schematic knowledge and an intuitive understanding of language as a system. This dynamic system functions so smoothly when we speak our foreign language that we typically have no clue as to its complexity. Learning a foreign language, however, brings us face-to-face with the challenge of integrating a new knowledge system into our minds.

Linguistic and cultural knowledge is primarily intuitive—it is processed at the level of the cognitive unconscious and involves System 1 “fast thinking” processes. (Kihlstrom 1987; Kahneman 2011) Native speakers just “know” whether an utterance sounds right. Foreign language education, on the other hand, often focuses on the attentive and analytic thinking processes of System 2 “slow thinking”. System 1 thinking evolved to handle routine tasks and is fundamentally pattern based and automatic. System two thinking, on the other hand, evolved to solve novel problems, and thus

involves focused attention and step-by-step reasoning. A fundamental challenge of foreign language learners is to transition from the conscious study of a language to the ability to use it naturally and automatically. For beginners, learning leans heavily on focused attention and analytic processing—trying to memorize a list of vocabulary words, for example, or understand grammar structures. At higher levels of learning—fluency practice, for example, or extensive reading—automatic processes come into play.

Once we internalize these patterns, of course, we cease to pay conscious attention to them. At that point, we reach a state of *dynamic equilibrium*, in which the patterns embodied in our cognitive systems mesh smoothly with the linguistic and cultural patterns found in our environment. Linguistic and cultural patterns become a medium through which we express ourselves and interact with others. Or to use a highly simplified metaphor, learning a new language is like learning to play a new game. Once we've internalized these "rules of the game"—the system of linguistic and sociocultural patterns—we can integrate ourselves into the communities that share that system. We can also start to develop our own personal style of play—to express our individual self through a new medium. This view sees language and culture as complex systems, an idea that has been articulated by Diane Larsen-Freeman in the field of second language acquisition. (Larsen-Freeman 2011) It reminds us that language learning involves not only adding information to a fixed system, but to modifying and creating new systems as well.

Talking about language and culture in terms of dynamic systems, while accurate in terms of systems theory or cognitive science, makes language learning sound like a rather technical undertaking. It's nothing of the sort. Patterns that are internalized such that they become automatic are experienced not as some "knowledge system" but as an integral part of who we are. The integration of foreign ways of thinking and acting into our cognitive systems involves a remaking of the self. It is a highly personal undertaking, one that can be stressful and intimidating, or exciting and transformational. Ironically, a neurocognitive perspective focuses attention



on the elements of learning that make us feel most human—growth, feeling, insight, and connection with community. The challenge for educators is to go beyond thinking of language and culture as information to know and skills to practice. It requires a more integrated approach that is grounded in science yet oriented towards growth.

### **Linguaculture learning**

The term *linguaculture*—or alternatively, *languaculture*—has been used by various scholars to refer to the intertwined nature of language and culture. (Agar 1994; Diaz 2013) It is grounded in the observation that linguistic competency and sociocultural competency are interrelated, and that linguistic meaning reflects the cultural worldview of that language's speakers. Since linguistic competence necessarily involves cultural competence, language and culture learning can never be fully separated. *Linguaculture learning*, then, refers to a single learning process that involves gaining both linguistic and cultural competence. Most often, of course, language is conceptualized on its own, as a collection of words to learn and grammatical rules to learn. Decontextualized in this way, the study of language becomes artificial—it ceases to be a part of a living community—an artifact that is analyzed and explained, rather than internalized and put to use. The term linguaculture acts as a reminder that linguistic competence is always contextual—we must communicate *with someone in some sociocultural context* in order to say that we've used language successfully.

PAL conceptualizes linguaculture learning as a developmental process that entails levels of increasing cognitive complexity—levels that correspond with changes in how learners experience the foreign language and foreign cultures. Central to this developmental view is the observation that increasing levels of ability correspond with changes in how a phenomenon is experienced. Young children, for example, are simply cognitively incapable of conceiving of abstract principles, and thus live in an experiential world that is more literal and concrete than that of older children or adults. Likewise, we've already discussed how naïve language

learners often have a simplistic understanding of the language learning process, and that those who have traveled little often have a naïve understanding of foreign people or places. PAL proposes that linguaculture learning also follows this sort of developmental learning arc. As linguistic and cultural patterns are internalized, things that were once foreign start to be experienced as a more integral part of our self, and are experienced in a more nuanced, complex way.

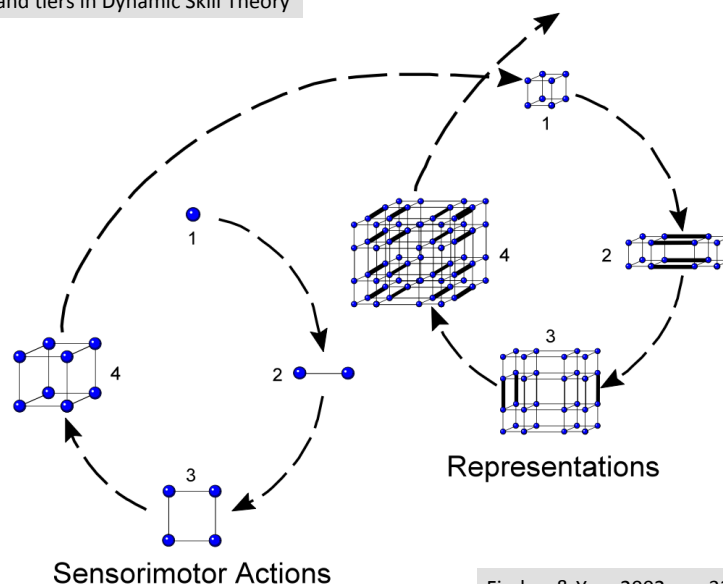
Naturally, many learners get “stuck” at some point in this process. They may lose motivation, feel frustration or resistance towards language study, or develop negative attitudes about a foreign culture. Rather than seeing this as “lack of motivation” or a “negative attitude”, PAL sees resistance as a natural part of the learning process. This view is consistent with social identity theory, and with an open systems perspective, one which sees learning as an ongoing process of taking in certain elements from the environment while resisting or rejecting others.(Kim 2001) From this perspective, learners who say they “hate” the foreign language are simply resisting an integration of foreign patterns into the territory of self. In a similar way, ethnocentrism is seen as a natural (albeit not desirable) state that serves as a starting point for cultural learning.

Conceptualizing linguaculture learning as a form of ongoing identity adjustment suggests a need to rethink of the role of educators. Although the psychological impact of foreign language and culture learning can be quite powerful, educators often focus heavily on linguistic performance and pay less attention to such adjustment challenges. It’s not an exaggeration to say that some learners are traumatized—in the sense of having habituated negative reactions—by language and/or cultural learning. (They aren’t called *foreign* languages for nothing!) A focus on the identity adjustment of linguaculture learning shifts attention from behavioral outcomes to the inner development of the learner, to an understanding of learning processes, and to a more developmental view of education. It sees the ultimate goal of linguaculture learning not simply as skill acquisition, but as an ongoing process that can result in personal growth and development.

### **Theoretical foundations of PAL**

PAL proposes that developmental arc of linguaculture learning follows a pattern identified by Kurt Fischer and others and referred to as Dynamic Skill Theory (DST). (Fischer 1980; Fischer and Bidell 2006) DST is a framework to help understand how people learn—how they develop new cognitive skills, social skills, language, perceptual-motor skills and problem solving. (Fischer 1980 pg. 477) DST describes learning as a developmental growth cycle consisting of increasing levels of organizational complexity. (Fischer and Yan 2002) These levels are not “stages” in the sense of being a clear step-like progression. Rather they represent cognitive reconfigurations as skills build upon themselves in a predictable sequence. (Fischer and Bidell 2006) At first there is the acquisition of a *single set*, a new behavior that can then be *mapped*, or connected with other related sets. This mapping then leads to a *system*, in which the skill reaches a new level of functional complexity. This system can, in turn, be related to other systems in a *system of systems*. Skills develop dynamically at these progressively higher levels of ability, including tiers that represent an exponential increase in complexity. This can be represented visually in the following way:

Levels and tiers in Dynamic Skill Theory



Central to DST is the idea that the development of new skills does not proceed in a step-by-step fashion. Performance varies depending on context, and it can seem to regress or develop unevenly. It may develop in spurts and be followed by a period of consolidation. DST is premised on the idea that an understanding of learning processes can inform pedagogy. (Fischer 2009) It provides a conceptual starting point for making sense of how learners gain new skills, and how to create optimal learning environments.

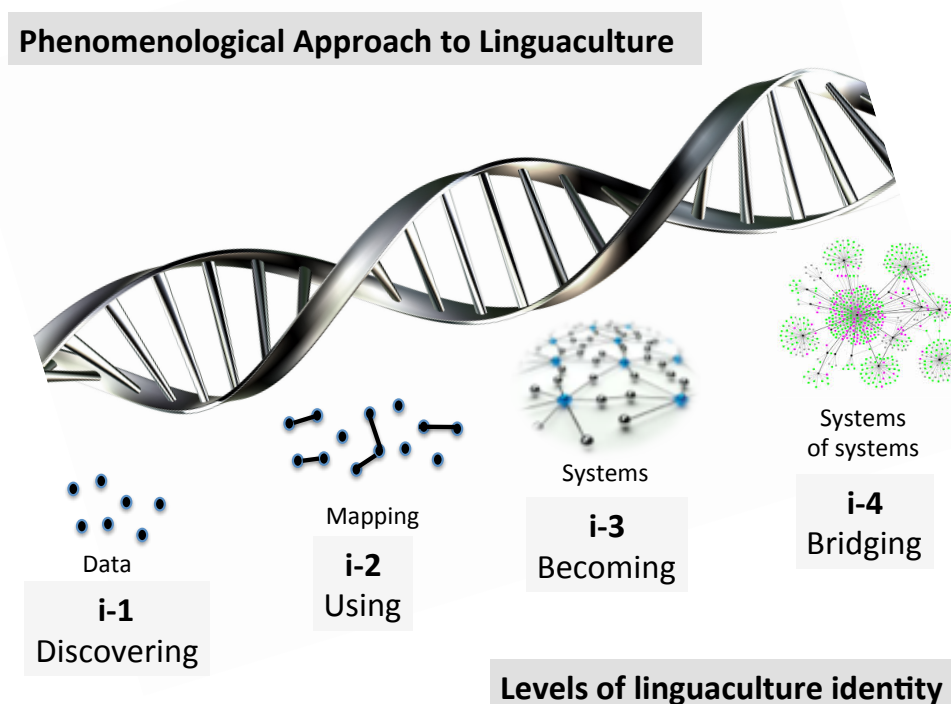
PAL borrows from DST but is also consistent with other conceptual frameworks currently found in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The *complex theory approach* to SLA, for example, emphasizes the dynamic, developmental nature of language learning. This starts with the assumption that language is a “dynamic system emerging from use” and that changes in such a complex system undergoes “a phase transition or phase shift in state of space in which a new order self-organizes, generating new, emergent behaviors”. (Larsen-Freeman 2011)(pg. 52) This description matches DST and jibes with the everyday experience of language learners, who often feel “in a rut” at a certain level of proficiency, or those who make a “breakthrough” to a higher level of ability. Both DST and a complex theory approach help us understand why learners may continue to make “basic”

mistakes, and why learner performance can vary so widely based on their state of mind, the atmosphere in class, the particular task, and so on.

PAL is also consistent with theoretical models found in the field of intercultural communication, and in particular the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), developed by Milton Bennett and others. (Bennett 1993; Hammer, Bennett et al. 2003) The DMIS has as its starting point a constructivist understanding of culture as shared patterns of interpretation, or what Bennett has described as the “unique way to discriminate phenomena in the world” within some cultural boundary condition. (Bennett 2013)(pg. 8) In this view, cultural communities are dynamic emergent phenomena, and thus do not necessarily have discrete, clearly marked boundaries. It is interaction among those within that boundary condition that produces culture. This constructivist view is also broadly consistent with approaches to language, culture and meaning found in the field of cognitive linguistics.(Evans and Green 2006; Bergen 2012; Tyler 2012) The DMIS proposes that intercultural sensitivity passes through developmental stages that involve an increasingly ethnorelative view of cultural difference. Also central to the DMIS is the idea that there are identifiable stages of intercultural sensitivity: *denial*, *defense*, *minimization*, *acceptance*, *adaptation*, and *integration*. These stages are manifest in how an individual perceives cultural difference. Someone at the *defense* stage, for example, may perceive foreigners as a threat, whereas someone at the *minimization* stage may feel that cultural difference is less important than some assumed universal human quality.

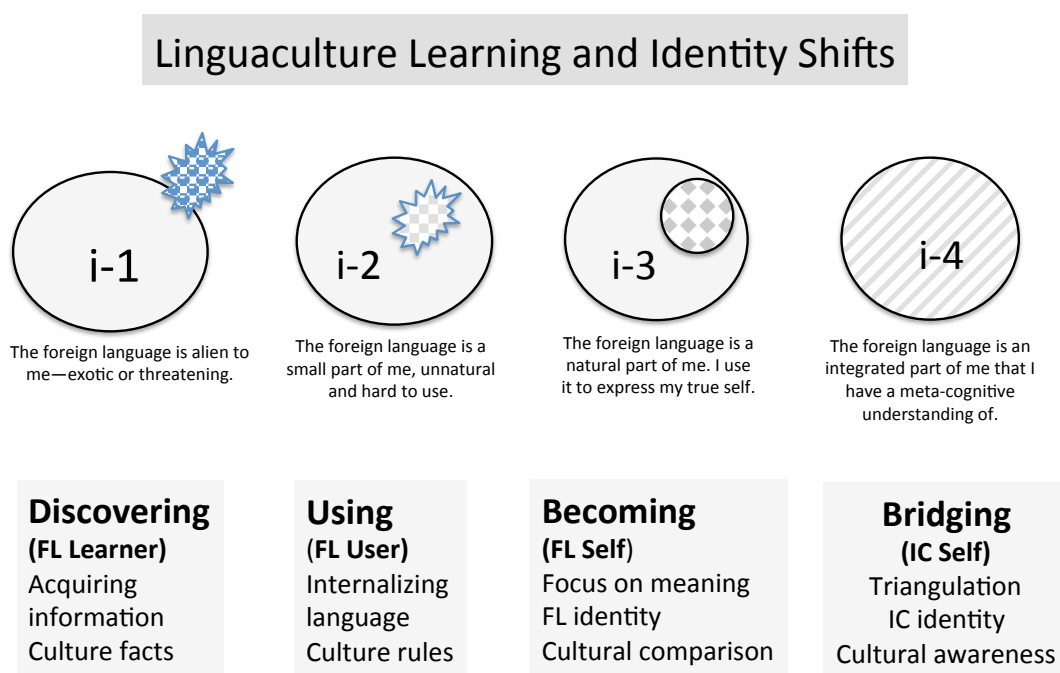
Building upon these theoretical foundations, PAL proposes that language learning and cultural learning are intertwined, much as a double helix is. Language learning can take place in the absence of cultural learning, but this requires an unnatural severing of language usage from cultural context, and language learning from cultural learning. It also proposes that as learners progress to higher levels of learning, that their experience of the foreign language and foreign cultures has the potential to change. These four levels are labeled i-1 (discovering), i-2 (using), i-3 (becoming) and i-4 (bridging). This can be represented visually as in figure ?. The two strands of

the double helix are language and culture—connected and intertwined. The twisting can also represent the idea that increases in ability do not proceed in a simple, linear, step-by-step fashion. They are dynamic, domain specific and variable.



From the learner's perspective, these levels are reflected in how the foreign language and culture are experienced. At the level of i-1, learners experience the foreign language and culture as fundamentally foreign or alien. They have a simplistic understanding of the learning process—primarily as a set of facts to know or knowledge to acquire. Learning involves *discovering* the nature of the foreign language and culture. At the level of i-2, learners start to think of language and culture more systematically—using vocabulary and grammatical structures, for example, to make sentences. At the i-2 level, language and culture start to be seen as something that needs to be practiced and internalized, not just memorized or remembered. Learning is experienced as a process of *using* or experimenting. At the i-3 level, learners start to use language and culture as a functioning

system. They have internalized linguacultural schema sufficiently to *forget*—at least temporarily—the previously foreign nature of these patterns. At this level, learners are engaged in a process of *becoming* a foreign language speaker, or a participant in a cultural community. Whereas i-2 learners focus heavily on the rules and structure of linguaculture, i-3 learners start to *be themselves* in the context of foreign linguistic and cultural systems. At the i-4 level, learners not only are comfortable within a foreign language or cultural context, they start to learn meta-lessons about language and cultural learning in general. This involves the ability to do a sort of *bridging* between different linguistic and cultural worlds, and draw broader lessons from this process. The four levels of linguaculture learning can be visualized as in figure ?.



It's important to point out that the levels proposed here are *dynamic* and *domain specific*. A learner may be at the i-3 level when talking about an easier topic, and perform at i-2 with a more challenging one. This also implies that the teacher's role in the classroom is to provide learners optimal support, such that they experience—at least temporarily—learning at a

higher level. This fits with the idea of scaffolding. Unsupported students may be able to give a presentation only at the i-2 level, for example, yet provided with instruction on how to make outlines, organize content, practice at home, and so on, their performance on the presentation may rise to the i-3 level. Any number of other factors may contribute or detract from learners performance, of course, including a supportive classroom atmosphere, the enthusiasm of the teacher, and so on. These levels are not intended to reflect absolute stages that are reached in the same way that one attains a particular score on a test. They are a description of various ways that learners experience the learning process at different times in the developmental process.

Because most language teachers are focused primarily on language learning, these four levels will make most sense in terms of how learners experience a foreign language. But PAL assumes that cultural learning follows a similar developmental arc. At i-1, a foreign culture (or perhaps, foreign cultures generally) is perceived as something to know *about*—factual knowledge regarding foreign places or things. At i-2, learners have a more systematic view of foreign cultures, with an understanding that behavioral expectations—etiquette or taboos—are different in foreign places. Such learners look for “rules” to follow when abroad. At the i-3 level, learners start to see that cultural difference represents not only rules, but a systematically different way of doing things and looking at the world. They see, for example, that foreign rules of etiquette represent not only behavioral strictures, but also a contrasting way of seeing the world and organizing human behavior. At the i-4 level, learners start to see cultural learning and difference from a more meta-perspective. They not only learn about a cultural understanding of a particular place, but of cultural learning as a larger process.

In an environment that allows for both language practice and cultural learning, PAL assumes that it’s possible for language and cultural learning to develop in parallel—increasing linguistic skills go along with a more sophisticated understanding of culture. Unfortunately, many classrooms focus almost exclusively on linguistic skill practice, and learners gain little appreciation of how language learning is related to cultural



learning. And while it's certainly true that even the best classroom-based instruction cannot be a substitute for intercultural experiences in foreign places, learners' attention can be focused on the cultural learning elements of language practice.

### **Linguaculture learning and identity**

Many language classrooms are heavily oriented towards the mastery of new skills. What's often overlooked, however, is that such mastery often corresponds to changes in one's sense of self. Someone who has just taken up tennis for the first time, for example, doesn't typically feel that they are a "tennis player". Rather, they say they are "learning how to play tennis". If they continue to improve, however, they will stop thinking about the process of *learning* tennis and simply feel that they are *playing* tennis. This phenomena can be understood from the perspective of open-systems theory, which sees all living systems as involving constant interaction between an organism and its environment. (Ruben 1972; Kim 2001) From this perspective, identity can be seen as *the psychological territory of the self*, with learning and adaptation seen as a process by which things perceived as a threat are resisted, whereas other elements seen as beneficial may be integrated into the self. This ongoing dynamic interchange is fundamental to growth and indeed life itself.

Our mind also distinguishes ideas and behaviors as either relatively within—a part of our psychological territory—or without, something perceived as alien to us. This psychological dynamic is consistent with the functioning of all living systems seeking to survive in an environment that presents both threatening and beneficial elements. Maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between our inner state and the conditions found in the environment is a critical survival challenge. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who has written in detail about how mind and self emerges from the biological processes of the brain (Damasio 2010), articulates this view in this way:

The specifications for survival that I am describing here

include: a boundary; an internal structure; a dispositional arrangement for the regulation of internal states so that those states are relatively stable. . . . It is intriguing to think that the constancy of the internal milieu is essential to maintain life *and* that it might be a blueprint and anchor for what will eventually become a self in the mind.

(Damasio 1999)(pg. 136)

The “regulation of internal states” that Damasio refers to is of critical importance for language teachers. It’s a reminder that taking new elements into the self requires an internal adjustment. In the language classroom, this is obvious, though usually not talked about in these terms. Some learners are eager to integrate new elements of linguaculture into the self—we typically say they are “motivated” or “interested”—while others resist this integration process. In other words, *the very foreignness of linguaculture learning provokes a psychological response that is felt at very deep levels of the self*. Earl Stevick, known for his humanistic approach to language education, describes the stresses of language learning in terms consistent with a open systems view of mind and learning.

(W)e may resist the language itself, just for its foreignness . . .  
(N)ew information is being imposed on us from outside ourselves. At best, this requires us to do the intellectual and emotional work of integrating the new into what we already had. Worse, it implies that what we already had was in some way inadequate. . . . We find ourselves in position of being ignorant, powerless, and constantly evaluated—a clear denial of our primacy. For any or all of these reasons, we may feel more or less of general resistance just to the idea of being taught. . . . (I)t can become traumatic. (Stevick 1980)(pg. 9-10)

The language Stevick uses here—imposing, foreignness, integration—reflects the open-systems perspective, yet describes it from the point of view of the learner, who may feel ignorant, powerless, and constantly evaluated. The “general resistance” that many learners feel, then, is not simply a “lack of motivation”. Resistance is a normal defensive response to having foreign elements imposed on our cognitive systems. This view of the learning process raises the stakes for language teachers. We are not only experts who supply

knowledge, or managers guide activities, we are also coaches and counselor responsible for helping learners manage this potentially traumatic reconfiguration of the mind.

Identity adjustment involves more than simply learning to have positive feelings about a foreign language. Research in cultural neuroscience reveals that self-construals are culture dependent and closely tied to particular patterns of cognition—they are, so to speak, soft-wired into our brain's cognitive architecture. (Markus and Kitayama 1991) Research has focused on independent and interdependent construals of self. The former involves an experience of self as bounded, with essential elements that make up the self, while the latter involves the experience of self as relational and interdependent—you are the relationships you have with the people close to you. In Japan, for example, colleagues refer to each other by title, rather than name, and parents may call each other “mother” or “father” even when children aren't around. These self-construals are said to be tied not only to our subjective experience of identity, but to cultural variation in cognition as well.

Neuroscientists found, for example, that when Chinese subjects thought about their mothers, their brain patterns were similar to those found when thinking about themselves. (Zhu, Zhang et al. 2007) Westerners thinking about their mothers, on the other hand, exhibited patterns similar to those found when thinking about a stranger. The Chinese subjects were, in effect, experiencing the people close to them as *a part of the self*. These varying self-construals have been associated with cultural differences in cognition. (Nisbett 2003; Han and Northoff 2008) For example, Westerners have been shown to think in a more analytic way compared to Asians, who tend to think more holistically. Chinese have been found to be more in tune with the perspectives of others than Americans. In addition, compared to East Asians, Americans tended to explain behavior more in terms of inner qualities (dispositions) than Asians, who focused more on situational factors. Such differences have also been found in classification tasks, in which European Americans tended to use categorical thinking whereas Asians tended to focus on relationships.

Research like this is a reminder that learning a new language, and thus learning to interact with others in new ways, potentially involves a form of cognitive restructuring. While language and culture do not control our thinking in some deterministic way, there is evidence that the way we construe events and experience the self depends in important ways on the language we speak and on our cultural background. (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Imai and Mazuka 2007; Chen, Xue et al. 2009; Dominguez, Lewis et al. 2009; Goh and Park 2009; Littlemore 2009; Bergen 2012) As cognitive linguist Jeannette Littlemore puts it:

Because perspective is never neutral, the language we use is not neutral either, rather it reflects certain ways of viewing the world . . . A language often contains ways of conventionally construing phenomena and events which sometimes differ from the way in which they are construed in other languages . . . It is because of these different construal patterns that learners of a second language sometimes comment that speaking the new language enables the to “see things in different ways”. (pg. 4)

This subjective sense of “seeing things in a new way” is an important thing for language teachers to keep in mind. An American learning Thai that struggles with honorifics not only has to learn grammatical rules to follow, she must construct a self that is comfortable with the social distinctions found in Thailand. A Thai learning English in the US, on the other hand, may have to learn to be more self-oriented in order to form relationships smoothly with Americans. A neurocognitive perspective reminds us that language, culture and self are not discrete entities that exist in some essential form. They are constructed, dynamic and interrelated. Thus, a focus on the subjective experience of self is not only a way of emphasizing personal growth in the classroom, it is empirically consistent with an understanding of the brain.

PAL assumes that learners should be actively thinking about their subjective feelings about linguaculture learning. Do they feel alienated by it? Do they feel resistance towards practice? They should also be reflecting on

their understanding of the linguaculture learning process. Do they think of language learning primarily in terms of memorizing factual information? Do they see that using language creatively is critical for internalizing new structures—going beyond the i-1 level of *discovering* to the i-2 level of *using*? Do they understand that a willingness to make mistakes is needed to go beyond the mapping stage of *using* to the i-3 level of *becoming*? Reflecting on the learner's relationship with foreign linguaculture is a way of putting classroom activities into a learning framework focused more on personal growth, and less on right answers and passing tests.

While the four stages of PAL may look simple, they represent a developmental process that is both dynamic and complex. PAL is not an attempt to create a simplified or reductionist account of language and culture learning. On the contrary, it seeks to open learners' eyes to the complex, dynamic, developmental and transformational elements of the learning process. Its not intended an assessment tool nor as a way to categorize students in a hierarchy of abilities. It's a way of talking about the *learning process* and about the learner's experience of that process.

### **The linguaculture classroom**

As I have said, PAL is a way of re-conceptualizing the language and culture learning process. Casual observers may not see obvious differences between a “linguaculture classroom” informed by PAL and one based on a more traditional view of learning. What sets the linguaculture classroom apart is the emphasis placed on three interrelated elements: 1) **vision**, 2) a roadmap, and 3) **community**. Vision refers to the way that learning objectives are defined and talked about. A roadmap helps learners see how classroom activities relate to that vision, and community is then nurtured such that learners work collaboratively towards that shared vision.

Broadly speaking, there are two complementary elements to the nurturing of a linguaculture classroom: learner *reflection* and teacher *mediation*. Reflective activities help learners become more aware of their inner state of learning and adjustment related to things such as: motivation, mental and emotional states, learning styles, feelings about the language,

intercultural experiences and opportunities for personal growth. Teacher *mediation* refers to the adjustments that teachers make to the learning environment so as to help learners overcome resistance and frame learning in terms of development and growth. Central to the idea of mediation is the teachers power to set expectations, make demands, and provide support. From the linguaculture perspective, the classroom is an *ecosystem of learning* that the teacher can influence in important ways. To see how that ecosystem of learning can be nurtured, let's look at vision, roadmap and community in turn.

## Vision

All classrooms have learning objectives, frequently articulated in terms of content to be covered or skills to be practiced. Learning objectives answer questions of great concern to learners: “What will I be doing here?” and “What is the purpose of this course/program?” In the linguaculture classroom, learning objectives are articulated not only in terms of *goals*—externally verifiable skills and behavioral outcomes (items to master)—but also in terms of *vision*, *an articulated set of internal, reflective learning objectives*. Put simply, goals are related to *doing*—desired future abilities and accomplishments. Vision, on the other hand, is related to *being* or *becoming*—the imagining of possible future states and personal growth experiences. Vision objectives are related to *how the learner experiences the foreign language and culture*. While goals are usually imposed on learners from the outside, a vision is something they are empowered to co-create with others.

As an example, some learners may say they are “no good at foreign languages”. From the PAL perspective, this resigned state can be considered a form of psychological *resistance*. A possible learning objective might be to move beyond resistance and on to a more positive experience of the foreign language. A teacher might tell such a student “In this class, I want us to work together to change your relationship with English.” That learning objective is then built into the overall structure of the course and in the way that classroom activities are structured. For example, students may be asked

to provide feedback forms about the learner's inner state, such as "How did you feel doing the presentation today? Did practicing the presentation beforehand help you gain confidence and become less nervous?"

The articulation of a learning vision should begin on the first day of class, when expectations of the course are first set. This process should include input from the teacher, but also provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their inner states and personal learning goals. Defining a vision is a way of shifting the learning focus away from an exclusive emphasis on skills and behaviors, to one that includes development and growth. For example, many learners would like to feel more confident when using a foreign language. They may, however, have little idea about how to nurture a feeling of confidence and accomplishment during classroom activities. They may vaguely assume that if they learn enough vocabulary words, or learn to make perfect sentences, that they will automatically become confident. PAL suggests a different understanding of confidence, as something gained through trial and error and a willingness to experiment.

This is a simple example of how an understanding of linguaculture learning can help teachers and learners rethink what they are trying to accomplish in the classroom. It doesn't mean that skills are not practiced, but that skill practice is done with an understanding of how it fits into the bigger picture of dynamic learning processes. This includes the fundamental realization that *increased skills are a consequence, or byproduct, of having internalized and put to use a new system of knowledge*. Increased skills are proof that an inner reconfiguration process has been successful. A failure to pay attention to the inner processes can result in resistance that impedes progress. The intent of PAL is not to ignore skills, but to remind learners and educators that paying attention to inner states and developmental processes are an essential part of improving skills.

### **Developmental roadmap**

Having a vision of a possible future is only meaningful to the extent to which educators can create a roadmap that will allow learners to navigate

the learning terrain that will lead to that desired outcome. Key to this is a clear understanding of the developmental levels of linguaculture learning—as sort of developmental roadmap. It's purpose is to help learners reflect on their relationship with the foreign language, to help them see that their attitude towards learning is important, and to identify level-appropriate strategies for achieving a higher levels of development. A description corresponding to the four levels can be seen in table ? This learning roadmap is a descriptive overview of what it feels like to progress to higher levels of linguaculture learning. Teachers can use this to help learners see the bigger picture of learning. Teachers can thus show learners how class activities are related to these goals.



<b>The Linguaculture Learning Roadmap</b>	
<b>i-1</b>	<b>Discovering (FL Learner)</b> Acquiring information - Culture facts
<p><b>Relationship with language and culture:</b> You experience foreign language and culture as something alien and outside of yourself. They may seem threatening, overwhelming or confusing. Foreigners may be seen in simplistic or stereotypical terms.</p> <p><b>Attitude towards learning:</b> You see FL and FC as information and facts that should be memorized and studied. You have a tendency to see things in terms of “right answers”. New knowledge is hard to relate to previous knowledge.</p> <p><b>Key to success:</b> Focus on autonomy in terms of learning strategies and habits. Focus on forming ongoing study habits rather than vague, distant skill goal. Create a sense of self as a FL learner. Recognize feelings of resistance. Connect FL to lived experience through stories, etc. Frame language learning in terms of larger life challenge of expanding one’s world.</p>	
<b>i-2</b>	<b>Using (FL User)</b> Internalizing language – Culture rules
<p><b>Relationship with language and culture:</b> You are starting to experience FL as something that is part of you, but it remains unnatural. You may use the FL, but do so uncomfortably. Cultural difference is seen in terms of etiquette, taboos and rules to follow.</p> <p><b>Relationship to learning:</b> You tend to see FL as rules and skills that must be mastered through analysis and practice. Language use begins to be creative. Learners start to distinguish between fluency and accuracy practice.</p> <p><b>Key to success:</b> The key challenge is experimentation and making mental connections. This requires a tolerance for ambiguity. Language practice should increasingly focus on meaning, not just form. Culture learning should focus on seeing that etiquette and taboos are a reflection of systematic cultural values.</p>	
<b>i-3</b>	<b>Becoming (FL Self)</b> Focus on meaning – FL identity – Cultural comparison
<p><b>Relationship with language and culture:</b> You experience the FL as something that is part of you that you are increasingly comfortable with. You are aware of your limitations, but feel that you are gradually becoming a competent English user. Foreign cultures start to be seen as representing contrasting worldviews.</p> <p><b>Attitudes towards learning:</b> You tend to see FL as something to be used and practiced in real communication. You recognize that language use is contextual. Language is seen as reflecting cultural values and lifestyle.</p> <p><b>Key to success:</b> The key challenge at the becoming stage is to expand your linguistic comfort zone, and to use English in increasingly creative ways that reflect your personal point of view and identity. Gain the confidence to repair communication and develop relationships using English. Learn that interpersonal understanding requires an understanding of cultural background.</p>	
<b>i-4</b>	<b>Bridging (IC Self)</b> Triangulation – IC Identity – Culture Awareness
<p><b>Relationship with language and culture:</b> You no longer feel the FL is foreign or unnatural. You are gaining a meta-awareness of language and culture learning. This allows you to “triangulate” and see beyond binary language-cultural comparisons.</p> <p><b>Attitudes towards learning:</b> You seek to become a bridge person between people with different language and cultural backgrounds, or an educator helping others with linguaculture learning.</p> <p><b>Key to success:</b> Don’t stop learning simply because you are comfortable within your immediate context. Think critically of the language and culture learning process.</p>	

## Community and collaboration

Linguaculture learning doesn't happen in isolation. PAL is consistent with a *collaborative learning* approach, which holds that new knowledge and skills are not constructed inside the mind of discrete individuals. Collaborative learning sees interaction and community as fundamental to the learning process. This is rooted in the view of learning developed by Lev Vygotsky, who argued that learning is inherently social, (Vygotsky 1978) and whose ideas have become increasingly influential in the field of second language acquisition.(Lantolf and Appel 1994) Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development*, which refers to the higher levels of achievement made possible by collaborative problem solving and support, has been particularly influential. This is closely related to the idea of scaffolding, an idea originating in social theory, which emphasizes the importance of context in learning, particularly when one person assists another to accomplish something that person couldn't have done on their own.(Ellis 2008)(pg. 235) A collaborative view of learning is also central to the idea of *communities of practice*, which the interrelationship between identity, community and learning. (Wenger 1998) This more contextualized view of learning has also influenced foreign language teaching through the development of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which seeks to integrate language practice with content teaching, in order to achieve a deeper learning than would be possible with a primary focus on skills alone.(Coyle, Hood et al. 2010)

The third step towards creating a linguaculture classroom, then, is the nurturing of community that shares a similar vision and understands the developmental roadmap. Ideally, learners should see that the inner learning objectives they have—the changes they want to make to their experience of the foreign language and culture—are both supported and made easier by the teacher, the class structure, the relationships between the learners, and so on. Most critically, they should be able to see, minute-to-minute and day-to-day, how classroom activities are related to these larger goals. They should be given frequent opportunities to reflect on and provide feedback about their evolving experience with the foreign

language.

Critically, learners need to see that their attitude about language learning and foreign cultures is critical to their success, and to the success of others. Teachers can focus in particular on helping students develop *autonomy*, *engagement* and *awareness*. Autonomy refers to what learners bring to the learning process—their interest, motivation, sense of responsibility and so on. Engagement refers to they take in from outside—as evidenced in learners curiosity, willingness to learn, interest in the course content and the lives of other learners, and so on. Awareness refers to the ability to examine one’s own learning process from a critical perspective, thus empowering learners. It also involves being aware of the learning processes of others, including the contribution that each learner makes to the learning community as a whole. Naturally, it’s the teacher who plays the most critical role nurturing the this kind of learning community, both by example and through the way that class is structured.

### **Unanswered questions**

This chapter has taken on a big topic in a limited space, and left some very important questions unanswered. I will at least mention some of these questions, and comment about the possible directions to explore when looking for answers.

- What is the precise nature of the language-culture connection?  
See chapter ? of this current volume. It explores recent research in neurolinguistics, with a particular focus on embodied simulation theory, that is shedding light on this connection.

- If language and culture learning are intertwined, can language practice lead to intercultural awareness?

Classroom learning is not a substitute for foreign experiences outside of the classroom, but a linguaculture classroom can lead to an awareness of the *culture learning process*, so that learners are caught less off guard in foreign settings. Skilled teachers can turn the classroom into an intercultural

learning zone in which intercultural awareness is a byproduct of language learning.

- Is PAL useful for teaching *about* culture as well (culture as content), or is it limited to language teaching from the perspective of cultural learning?

See chapter ? of this volume for a view of how cultural learning (as opposed to language practice) can be made a primary focus of the linguaculture classroom.

- How is linguistic ability related to intercultural awareness? Some people learn to speak a foreign language fluently without much cross-cultural experience, don't they?

Some language learners seem to develop fluency without gaining much intercultural understanding. They are in danger, however, of becoming “fluent fools” because they don't gain sociocultural competencies, and indeed may not even notice that such skills are missing.

- What concrete steps can I take to start introducing PAL into my classroom?

There is an online instrument (<http://www.pico-global.com/ILCLP/Default.aspx>) that asks learners to reflect on their level of linguaculture learning and provides a customized profile that can be used for in-class discussion. To join a community of teachers interested in an integrated approach to language and culture learning, see: [www.linguaculture.org](http://www.linguaculture.org). You can also contact the author through that site.

## Endnotes

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Our brains and minds are shaped by our experiences, which mainly occur in the context of the culture in which we develop and live. Although psychologists have provided abundant evidence for diversity of human cognition and behaviour across cultures, the question of whether the neural correlates of human cognition are also culture-dependent is often not considered by neuroscientists. However, recent transcultural neuroimaging studies have demonstrated that one's cultural background can influence the neural activity that underlies both high- and low-level cognitive functions. The findings provide a novel approach by which to distinguish culture-sensitive from culture-invariant neural mechanisms of human cognition.

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