Underlying Metaphoric Conceptualization of Learning and Intercultural Communication

Yasukata Yano

Waseda University

The ultimate purpose of foreign language learning is to be able to communicate with no unnaturalness with the speakers of that language. That means to think, feel, and react as those speakers do, that is, sharing with them the thought and behavioral patterns which are controlled by the norm (beliefs, views, and values) of their society. It is "to develop in oneself communicative competence," (Yano, 1997). In the Hymesian tradition, communicative competence is knowledge or capability relating to the rules of language use in context (Hymes, 1972). It includes linguistic, discourse, strategic, and sociological competences, to which is added cognitive competence as a result of cognitive linguistics development. The speaker's cognitive mode, categorization, process of conceptualization of the outside world are recognized as the integral part of one's communicative competence.

In the age of intercultural communication, however, the knowledge and sensitivity to different cultures are of fundamental importance to those who are involved in communication across cultures. At the same time, they are expected not to lose their own cultural identities in their communicative behavior no matter which language they communicate in. To what extent then should they acquire communicative competence in the target language/culture?

This makes it relevant to study the interplay of different social rules and cultural values which function as the norms and patterns that condition the conduct of communication and its interpretation in respective communities. What

we need to bear in mind in these socio-cultural studies is that no culture has a monopoly on correct socio-cultural behavior. No learners of English intend to become Americans, British nor other native English speakers by studying English, as some TESOL professionals erroneously believe; they intend to use English for communication across cultures.

It is well timed, therefore, that these research papers are done on the underlying metaphoric conceptualization of learning in Chinese, English, Greek and Japanese. Analysis of proverbs and metaphors is one of the best ways to examine how people conceptualize experiences, things and events in their language since they are the essence of the cultural tradition of the society. Some conceptualization may be culture-specific and some may be universal.

A foreign language classroom is where intercultural communication takes place and where different "cultures of learning" meet since participants bring their cultural expectations about teaching and learning with them. Jin and Cortazzi define "culture of learning" roughly as socially transmitted expectations, beliefs and values about what good teaching and learning are. It provides the framework of expectations, interpretations and evaluations of learning. Both teachers and students make foreign language teaching and learning more effective by learning each other's culture of learning, the process of which they call "cultural synergy."

In their paper, Jin and Cortazzi compare the British, Chinese and Japanese cultures of learning through questionnaires and interviews to university students in respective cultural groups on the topics of "a good teacher," "a good student," and "asking questions" in class. They report that the Chinese and Japanese students are more knowledge-centered while the British students are more skill, method and organization-centered; the Chinese and Japanese students cast a benevolent parent-like image on a teacher while the British students value a teacher who is disciplinarian but skilled in relating to learners; and as a student, the British and Chinese students think it most significant to develop independent thinking while the Japanese students most value being well motivated, although all three cultural groups share the value of hardworking. Regarding asking questions in class, the British students are expected to ask questions as a way of learning (heuristic questioning) while Chinese students are expected to ask questions after learning (reflective questioning) and do so after the class, which Jin and Cortazzi interpret as signs of respect for the teacher and being obedient, originating in the Confucian tradition.

Jin and Cortazzi have demonstrated that there are different underlying cultural concepts of learning in foreign language teaching in the case of the British, Chinese and Japanese cultural groups. Their message is clear: since a culture of learning provides the framework of expectations, interpretations and evaluations of learning, both teachers and students need to learn how to interpret the other's culture and the other's culture of learning. How to put this idea into practice, however, is left to future research, that is, making cultural synergy models for foreign language learners according to their respective cultures. In making, for example, the cultural synergy model for Chinese learners of English, the choice of which cultural elements to include and which to exclude is an issue to be discussed further. Even before that, research may need to expand its scope from cultural conceptualization to one that includes cognitive, psychological and other related conceptualization of learning before the fruit of the research is applied to actual foreign language teaching. Needless to say, that does not reduce the value of this research.

Proverbs and metaphorical expressions are the essence of the cultural tradition of a society, namely, the system of beliefs, values, and views which forms the social norms. They are, accordingly, one of the best ways to examine how people conceptualize experiences, things and events in their language.

Following Johnson's view that metaphor is the basis of the conceptual systems by means of which people understand and act within their worlds, Turner looks at the underlying conceptualization of the journey (the image schema of source, path, and goal with accompanying notions such as challenging and exploration) in the western cultural understanding of the process of learning.

Turner points out that the process of learning is also a journey of questioning, the art of which has a rich heritage in the western educational tradition that goes back to Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates.In the western society, questioning plays an important role as a means of discovering the essence of things. In foreign language classrooms too, asking questions is encouraged as a way of learning as Jin and Cortazzi have indicated (heuristic questioning).

In the light of intercultural communication, I wonder if the English speakers should impose their tradition of questioning on the non-native English speakers

who are from a culture where reflective, not heuristic, questioning (in Jin and Cortazzi's term) is the norm.

The presentation of critical views is also important in the western world as Turner cites Socrates: The life not tested by criticism is not worth living. In intercultural communication, Asian people may have difficulty to present their own critical views when they are from the society where the Confucian tradition teaches them to respect and be obedient to elders, and not to have the others lose face by criticizing them. In the age of intercultural communication, however, I wonder if the British tutor should impose this critical behavior on foreign learners of English.

Turner concludes her paper by saying that learning as search and discovery, or as the exercise of analytical and comparative judgment, may no longer be appropriate in the exploration of cyberspace. In her next paper, I hope she will propose underlying conceptualization different from the journey in our cultural understanding, where the non-western, as well as the western, conceptualization of the process of learning is referred to.

Hiraga, a long-time research associate of Turner, presents the Japanese counterpart of the Turner's paper, namely, the examination of metaphors that underlie the conceptualization of the process of learning. Hiraga mentions that the Japanese traditional concepts about learning can be characterized by three basic metaphors (LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, LEARNING IS IMITATING THE MODEL, and TEACHER IS A FATHER) and a modern addition (EDUCATION IS WAR).

LEARNING IS A JOURNEY is the dominant metaphorical conceptualization and it is typically expressed in the Japanese word compounds with DOO 'way' in the names of traditional study disciplines, reflecting the concept that learning is to follow a path by observing and imitating their master, where the master is regarded as a father. Referring to the image schema of source, path, and goal, Hiraga observes that the Japanese emphasize 'path' rather than 'source' or 'goal,' reflecting the Japanese emphasis on the interpersonal aspect of learning.

In the journey of learning, one follows the master, that is, he/ she imitates what the master offers as the model, practices it, and repeats it. The teacher-

student relationship is conceptualized as that of parent-child in the familial system, where seniority and authority are emphasized.

The metaphor EDUCATION IS WAR was added as a result of modernization of the educational system which took place in the latter half of the Meiji era. Having a good educational background became a key to success in climbing the social ladder with severe competition in passing entrance examinations.

It is interesting to note that the Japanese share the same metaphorical conceptualization of LEARNING IS A JOURNEY with the western people but theirs are characterized as being passive, dependent, obedient, and respectful to elders, the obvious indication of the Confucian influence and that of the vertical and familial system of the Japanese society. In the western world, on the other hand, the learners can be characterized as active, independent, critical or judgmental, and perhaps rebellious. As Hiraga herself mentions, she and Turner expect to apply their findings in their future research on behavioral differences in intercultural communication.

On the assumption that proverbs let us recognize the truth, reason, ideal and providence of the world, Ukida compares proverbs related to learning in Modern Greek and Japanese to find their underlying metaphorical conceptualization of learning in these languages.

Ukida starts with proverbs on bringing up children, with the value of severity, affection, and indulgence. He then goes on to proverbs on the environmental and parental influence on children. He further studies proverbs on children's inborn characters, proverbs on the timing of education, and proverbs on usefulness and uselessness of education.

His painstaking collection and categorization of proverbs in Modern Greek and Japanese are intellectually entertaining. I'm afraid, however, that Ukida could have made a little clearer the differences and similarities of underlying metaphorical conceptualization of learning in the two languages. Also there seems to be unevenness in the explication of what lies behind his observations. For example, he rightly explains that the reason why the Greeks use many domesticated animals in their proverbs has come from the stock-farming prototype of their lifestyle. In regard to why Japanese use more proverbs on the parent-child relationship, however, he simply says that the relationship plays a more significant role in life in Japan than in Greece. This is contrary to my own

observation of Greek families which have very strong and tight family-ties among the members.

I hope Ukida will supply us with more detailed explications on the principles that underlie these proverbs on learning in the two languages.

Finally, Berendt and Souma present a comparative research paper in quest of metaphoric patterns of underlying conceptualization of learning in English and Japanese discourse. First of all they should be congratulated for their paper's scale and comprehensiveness of the research, whose extensive data in the appendix alone can be sources for other similar and related research projects. To my knowledge this attempt to use a systematic data base in analyzing underlying conceptual patterns is unique and provides an in-depth opportunity to examine to what extent various patterns are utilized in communicating a particular domain rather than depend upon *ad hoc* collations of examples.

Berendt and Souma not only make a complete analysis of the data into underlying conceptual patterns but also have selected relevant genre in the domain of learning: academic/technical writing, essay writing and conversational discourse. Not only was a multiplicity of patterns found but they propose a "metaphoric density" in genre as a criterion in researching the respective genre. Perhaps the most important result is the degree to which writers/speakers use a variety of underlying patterns to communicate their intent in the domain of learning. They point out that conversation had a low density of patterns but that the density varied from one writer to another. The potential richness of pattern use is an important point when considering the issues of linguistic relativity. The human mind in the individual communicator has a multiplicity of resources to choose from in realizing the communicative goal. Without an extensive data base such issues could not be addressed.

Another issue which the data-based study of Berendt and Souma provides is an opportunity to examine that of universal vs culturally bound underlying conceptual patterns. As these results show, the type of patterns which Lakoff has argued as being universal have a high frequency of occurrence in their study and that the culturally bound types of patterns with a few exceptions are generally in the lower range of use. While the second language learner needs ultimately to cope with virtually all conceptual patterns of use, that fact that most of the high frequency pattern in English and Japanese reflect those of the universal type is useful for language education as well as intercultural communicators.

Lakoff (1987) argued that certain underlying conceptualization patterns should be universal across cultures since the patterns reflect the fundamental experiences of all peoples. I wonder, however, if we can view not only certain but all underlying conceptualization patterns as universal. Then we may be able to set up a number of underlying conceptualization patterns that subsume all seemingly culture-specific conceptualization patterns. As Berendt and Souma rightly point out, the issues of completeness, the degree of abstraction, the judgment to separate universal and culture-specific patterns and so forth always accompany these kinds of research projects. Nevertheless, the attempt seems to be significant and worth trying.

As Hiraga did, we certainly can regard the traditional way Japanese learn (imitate, practice, repeat) and the way the westerners learn (questioning, arguing, criticizing, judging) as culture-specific. However, we can view that "what" (the underlying conceptualization pattern) is one and the same, just differing in "how" (the way to look at it). The multi-faceted pattern LEARNING IS A JOURNEY is viewed in Japan, focusing on the passive side through the system of vertical and familial society influenced by the Confucian way of thinking, while it is viewed in the western world, focusing on the active side through the competitive, argumental, and challenging way of thinking.

The five papers reviewed here contribute to cognitive linguistics research as well as intercultural communications research. Since each of them seems to be part of a comprehensive, long-term research projects, I am looking forward to reading them again in their further stage of development.

References

Canale, M. and M. Swain
1980 "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing," *Applied Linguistics* 1.1, 1-47.

Hymes, D.H.
1972 "On Communicative Competence," Pride, J.B. and J. Holmes, eds. *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 267-293.

Wolfson, N.
1989 *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Yano, Y.
1997 "A View on Features of Japanese as a Foreign Language," Hubbard, M., T. Sakamoto, and J. Davis, eds. *Progress in Japanese Linguistics and Pedagogy*. Tokyo: ALC Press, 19-24.