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## Language and cultural values: The ethnolinguistic pathways model

Bert Peeters

(Macquarie University)

### Abstract

It is important for non-native speakers to acquire as soon as possible a relative awareness of the cultural values and the communicative norms which prevail in the language community of their speech partners. Immersion is usually the means recommended to achieve that end, as it is through immersion in a foreign culture that differences with one's own culture come to the fore. The hypothesis on which this paper is built is that judicious exploitation of selected resources of a foreign language in the (advanced) foreign language classroom is likely to facilitate subsequent immersion: five ethnolinguistic pathways, which may appeal to researchers as well, will be defined to help with the discovery and/or increased understanding of the values upheld by those who have acquired the foreign language from birth. The aim of the "ethnolinguistic pathways model" is to illustrate how the study of communicative behaviours, phrases, key words and productive syntactic patterns can lead to the discovery of putative cultural values which are then to become the subject of further investigation leading to either the confirmation or rejection of their assumed status; and also how, through detailed study of communicative behaviour, phrases, key words and productive syntactic patterns, cultural values typically associated with a particular linguistic community can be further corroborated.<sup>1</sup>

Misunderstandings that occur when those who partake in verbal interaction do not share the same native language, but use that of one of the speech participants instead, are often brought about by unsuspected cultural differences (§1). It is therefore important for a non-native speaker to acquire as soon as possible a relative awareness of the cultural values and the communicative norms which prevail in the language community of the speech partner. Immersion is usually the means recommended to achieve that end, as it is through immersion in a foreign culture that differences with one's own culture come to the fore (§2). The hypothesis on which this paper is built is that judicious exploitation of selected resources of the foreign language (i.e. the native language of the speech partner) in the (advanced) foreign language classroom is likely to facilitate and clear the path for

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<sup>1</sup> Substantially the same material as is presented here in English can also be found, in French, in the first chapter of a book titled *Langue française, valeurs françaises: Pour une approche des valeurs culturelles à travers la langue* (Peeters forthcoming). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for comments which have helped improve this paper.

subsequent immersion: a number of ethnolinguistic pathways, which may appeal to researchers as well, will be defined to help with the discovery and/or the increased understanding of the values upheld by those who have acquired the foreign language from birth (§3,4).

### Misunderstanding (“Pragmatic failure”)

When two or more individuals come together to talk, question, contradict or convince one another, to exchange ideas and share views etc., they are said to engage in verbal interaction. Ideally, they take turns: when one speaks, the other (or the others) listen. The speaker’s main duty is to make herself understood, to convey a message. Most of the time, speakers do not speak unless they have something to say: there must be an intent to communicate. The listener’s main duty is to try and understand what has been said, to identify the communicative intent of the speaker with a view to reacting in an effective and an appropriate manner. The effort typically required by this *quest for meaning* (Dascal 1992:110) must not be underestimated, even though the hurdles on the road towards understanding are mostly avoided without the listener even being aware of their existence. Some hurdles are not negotiated as easily as others: they are literally insurmountable or can only be overcome at considerable cost (cf. Peeters 2003a). Furthermore, the problems encountered during the quest for meaning – any quest for meaning – arise in *endolingual* as well as in *exolingual* situations. Following Porquier (1984), endolingual communication occurs when two individuals who belong to the same language and culture grouping communicate in their first language, or in the only language they practice. All other forms of communication are exolingual. Hence, two native speakers of English who communicate in English engage in an endolingual speech event (unless, for instance, one of them is American and the other one Australian). On the other hand, a native speaker of English who addresses a native speaker in French in the latter’s language engages in an exolingual speech event (as would, for example, a native speaker of French who addresses a native speaker of German in English). Now, even though the same problems arise during the quest for meaning, irrespective of the nature of the speech event (exolingual or endolingual), the listener is likely to be less prepared for any hurdles in an exolingual situation. The reason for this is simple: as Wierzbicka (2003:69) reminds us in the first of four premises in the realm of cross-cultural communication, “in different societies, and different communities, people speak differently”. To ignore these differences is tantamount to exposing oneself to a possible failure of the quest for meaning, in particular because of a misunderstanding or of what has been referred to in the literature as a “pragmatic failure”.<sup>2</sup>

Misunderstanding or pragmatic failure arises when a speaker is credited by a listener with a communicative intent that was not envisaged. As long as it is acknowledged that misunderstanding can also surface in endolingual situations, this could be further illustrated in an exolingual context by stating that it occurs when a native speaker is credited by a non-native speaker with a communicative intent that was in fact unintended, or vice versa. It has been customary, since Thomas (1983), to distinguish between *socio-pragmatic* and *pragma-linguistic* failures, even though the line is sometimes hard to draw (*ibid.*:109). The latter type of failure unfolds when a non-native speaker lends to an utterance a different intent from the one that native speakers convey through it. The non-native speaker will have to “unlearn” the misguided communicative intent and instead acquire the appropriate one. The incorrect usage of *merci* in French and *thank you* in English (further illustrated below) is a case in point and results in pragma-linguistic failure. Socio-pragmatic failure, on the

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<sup>2</sup> This term appears to have been coined by Thomas (1983, 1984). It was subsequently taken up by Blum-Kulka & Olsh-tain (1986) and is now widely used in a variety of contexts.

other hand, is harder to grasp and has more serious consequences: it occurs when crucial cultural differences are linguistically encoded and the difference in cultural coding is not unscrambled by the non-native speaker, who may even refuse to acknowledge the difference, which in turn leads to perpetuation of the communicative tension likely to result from such a refusal. A French person who declines to conform to the way in which requests are phrased in English risks exposure to socio-pragmatic failure.<sup>3</sup>

Provided they are in possession of a sound knowledge of the cultural make-up of their speech partners, non-native speakers will generally be successful in averting the majority of misunderstandings which are likely to arise. They will manage to explain, without too much trouble and with an appropriate dose of diplomacy why misunderstandings which did occur were unable to be averted. They will normally have a fair degree of *savoir-faire* at their disposal, which will enable them to weather the numerous challenges raised by intercultural communication: they will display considerable talent in failure management, including conflict resolution as well as steps to reduce any frictions resulting from misunderstandings which do not subside more or less spontaneously.

Some misunderstandings may however have far-ranging social implications. Consider the case of a native speaker who feels the way he or she was spoken to was excessively rude. Native speakers in this category are unlikely to merely condemn the communicative behaviour, i.e. the lack of courtesy displayed at a particular point in time by their non-native counterparts. Instead of simply disapproving this behaviour and of objectively attributing the resulting tension to insufficient awareness of the culture encoded in the target language, they will often go a lot further. Rather than to take the misunderstanding that has occurred for what it is, viz. a mere misunderstanding, they may view it as evidence either of a personal or a social shortcoming of the non-native speaker, or of an attitude which comes close to insolence or impertinence, which is proof of bad faith, poor education or a lack of sociability. In the worst-case scenario, a non-native speaker will face accusations of belonging to an aberrant or an inferior cultural group. To put it differently, the condemnation will focus on the individual rather than on a mere lack of linguistic competence, and will often be based on unhelpful prejudice and stereotypes. Attributing the causes of a misunderstanding to flawed knowledge of the target language is insufficient; explaining the causes of a misunderstanding in terms of a cultural or national stereotype (“the French are arrogant”, “Australians lack sincerity”, “the Japanese are obsequious”, “Germans are abrasive” etc.) is excessive. Stereotyping is common among those who stick to the norms of their own culture, who fall prey to unforgivable ethnocentrism, who perceive and seek to interpret foreign cultures in terms of their own. Such fixation is not about to disappear and must be fought on all fronts and at all cost.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> No matter how useful the distinction may be, adopting it (as I did in Peeters 1997) increases our chances of positing – quite unjustifiably (see below) – that some misunderstandings which come to the fore in intercultural communication are *a priori* non-cultural in nature. It is for this reason that I abandoned the distinction in Peeters (2003b) and remain undecided today.

<sup>4</sup> Even though, in practical terms, it may be a hard distinction to make, it is important at a theoretical level to distinguish between the two main forms of communicative failure, viz. misunderstanding (the focus of our preceding remarks) and mere inability to understand. Native speakers who speak too fast, who use a dialect which is relatively impenetrable, who do not articulate properly, or who use too great a number of complex words have undoubtedly as much trouble to get their message across than do non-native speakers who express themselves with a relatively strong accent or who use the wrong vocabulary. In both cases, the danger of there being no understanding at all looms large – and the concomitant risk of embarrassment is considerable.

### Cultural differences

It is generally recognised that the best way to acquire non-native cultural values and communicative norms is through lengthy *immersion*, i.e. daily contact during which non-native speakers are able to observe, assimilate and more or less successfully imitate the “foreign behaviours” they witness. Indeed, even after an extensive period of foreign language learning in a classroom setting, non-native speakers are at risk of having acquired no more than an approximate mastery of the norms and values of the associated culture. Communicative norms and cultural values are generally marginalised in language classes, and most language textbooks contain very few relevant indications (cf. Dewaele & Wourm 2002). As native speakers themselves are ill-prepared when it comes to teaching or transmitting their values and norms to non-native speakers, the learner is compelled to develop a particular skill known in French as *savoir-apprendre*: a preparedness or a cognitive ability to familiarise oneself with new knowledge, to “acculturate” – independently, outside of any formal learning. “Savoir apprendre” (“to know how to learn”) is to be able to learn without being taught (Gremmo 1995-96).

It is through *immersion* in a foreign culture that the realisation will come that “in different societies, and different communities, people speak differently”. This was referred to above as the first of the four basic premises formulated by Wierzbicka (2003) in the area of cross-cultural communication. Speaking differently is not just a matter of speaking a different language, with a different lexicon and a different grammar; it is above all a matter of respecting *cultural values* and *communicative norms* that differ from one language community to the next. As we shall see below, the focus of the first of Wierzbicka’s premises is on communicative norms only. Goddard (2000) talks about them very succinctly and clearly in the following terms:

In some parts of the world, for example, it is quite normal for conversations to be loud, full of animation, and bristling with disagreement, while, in others, people prefer to avoid contention, to speak in even, well-considered phrases, and to guard against exposure of their inner selves. In some societies, it is considered very bad to speak when another person is talking, while in others, this is an expected part of a co-conversationalist’s work. In some places, silence is felt to be awkward and people rush to fill up every spare second with talk, while in others, silence is welcomed (Goddard 2000:81).

The existence of different communicative behaviours from one language or one community to another one can never be sufficiently emphasised. The reason why ways of speaking, i.e. communicative habits, within one group contrast with those of other such groups is ultimately due to the fact that the various groups adhere – or rather tend to adhere – to different communicative norms.

“Thou shalt not whinge”; “Thou shalt not try to be better than others”; “Thou shalt not carry on like an idiot”. Of the three “Australian cultural commandments” listed by McFadyen (1995), two are communicative norms craftfully expressed in deeply culture-laden language: the verb *whinge*, on the one hand (Wierzbicka 1997:214-217), and the idiomatic expression *carry on like an idiot*, on the other hand. The third so-called commandment (McFadyen’s second one) appears to cover a much broader area than communication: it belongs to a higher category, of which communicative norms could be considered to be a subset, and which might be called *behavioural* or *cultural norms*. Closer analysis reveals that, unlike McFadyen’s first and third commandments, the second (about trying not to be better than others) is not a norm that most Australians adhere to. A better formulation would be “Thou shalt not be a tall poppy” – where the term *tall poppy* is an Australianism which has already conquered New Zealand and is spreading fast to other areas of the English-speaking world.

### Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model

Not all high achievers are tall poppies: only those who brag about their achievements (a behaviour for which there is a negative communicative norm, as it is behaviour that is not condoned) qualify for this unflattering label, as do those who engage in (sometimes illegal) practices which they presume their elevated status entitles them to. In the Australian cultural landscape, tall poppy behaviour attracts general criticism, summarised in the saying that “tall poppies deserve to be cut down” (cf. Peeters 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

Communicative norms are relatively stable and do not easily lend themselves to modification or to being cast aside under the influence of contradictory norms coming from elsewhere. Speaking in general terms, one might say that communicative norms *prescribe* some linguistic behaviours and *proscribe* others, or rather, as respect for the norms is by definition a matter of degree, that they *encourage* some behaviours and *discourage* others. That they are not absolutely binding is a point which has been forcefully made by Goddard (1997:199), who claims that such norms (he calls them *cultural* rather than *communicative*) “may be followed by some of the people all of the time, and by all of the people some of the time, but [...] are certainly not followed by all of the people all of the time”. Nevertheless, any departures from existing norms are at the personal risk of the offender. Wierzbicka (2001) has this to say about a widespread usage among Australians:

If someone doesn't like addressing colleagues and co-employees of the same institution by their first name, and being so addressed by them, he or she still needs to be aware of the prevailing norms in this respect, and of their meaning (Wierzbicka 2001:210).

The *second* of the four Wierzbickian premises in regard to cross-cultural communication deals with the *nature* of the differences: “These differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic”. By pointing out that a difference is *profound*, one actually underscores its significance. It should not be ruled out that selected communicative norms in two languages, whether typologically or genetically related or not, are relatively close to one another. However, as soon as the sample of languages taken into consideration is broadened, it will be easy to see that the differences become more obvious, and norms that are diametrically opposed will not be hard to find. As a matter of fact, such diametrically opposed norms may be found even in languages which are neither typologically nor genetically very different at all, e.g. French and English. Take, for instance, the case of the non-native speaker who is being offered a drink. If we are dealing with a native speaker of French who, during a trip to an English-speaking country, is confronted with a second but unwanted cup of coffee (Vogel & Cormeraie 1996:45), the reason is likely to be that the speaker said *thank you*, without realising that doing so in English when an offer is made normally implies that the offer is being accepted rather than turned down: our native speaker intended to say *merci*, meaning ‘no, thanks’, but used a routine which, in this particular context, means ‘yes, please’. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with a native speaker of English who, to no avail, is waiting for the *petit cognac* that was offered and that proved irresistible (Riley 1989:236), the reasons is likely to be that the speaker said *merci*, without realising that doing so in French when an offer is made normally implies that the offer is being turned down rather than accepted: our native speaker intended to say *thank you*, meaning ‘yes, please’, but used a routine which, in this particular context, means ‘no, thanks’.

Are the differences that we find *systematic*? Perhaps, in some cases, when there is insufficient evidence, doubt is permitted. However, even those who are inclined to say that there are differences which are profound but do lack systematicity will have to admit that the world's languages have anything but yielded all of their secrets. It is entirely possible that there exists a high degree of systematicity which has not as yet been entirely uncovered. It is probably preferable to postulate systematicity, and to proclaim there is plenty of it, than to acknowledge – while waiting for the time to

### Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model

come when someone will be smart enough to gain a full understanding of the exact links that exist between the communicative norms which prevail within a language – that arbitrariness reigns supreme. The former of these stands encourages further reflexion; the latter is quite frankly defeatist.

Having said that in different societies and different communities, people speak differently, and that these differences are profound and systematic, Wierzbicka goes on to talk about *cultural values*. She links the divergence of communicative norms – irrespective of whether their systematicity has been proven or not – to a divergence of a different type, at a deeper level. According to her *third* premise, different ways of speaking (i.e. different communicative norms) “reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values”. This is consistent with what Thomas (1983:106) had said a number of years earlier: “In different cultures, different pragmatic ‘ground rules’ may be invoked”, and “Relative values such as ‘politeness’, ‘perspicuousness’, may be ranked in a different order by different cultures”. It should be added that, in addition, they may not entirely map onto one another: there is no such thing as a universal concept of politeness, or of perspicuousness etc.

Social psychologists define *values*, whether personal or shared, as general beliefs which determine how people assess real or imagined behaviour: which behaviours are appropriate, desirable, to be encouraged, on the one hand, and which others are inappropriate, undesirable and not to be encouraged, on the other hand. Feather (1996) provides the following clarification:

The values that people hold are fewer in number than the much larger set of specific attitudes and beliefs that they express and endorse. Values are not equal in importance but they form a hierarchy of importance for each individual, group, or culture, with some values being more important than others. Values have some stability about them but they may change in relative importance depending on changing circumstances. They are not cold cognitions but are linked to the affective system. People feel happy when their important values are fulfilled; angry when these values are frustrated (Feather 1996:222).

*Cultural values* are those that are widespread within a given culture. They underpin the beliefs, the convictions, the attitudes and the communicative ways generally associated with it. They belong to what is increasingly referred to as a *doxa*, a shared set of high level beliefs that all those who belong to the same culture can – and mostly do – relate to, and may elude not only those who have at best an approximate idea of the culture that they help shape, but also those who live and breathe that culture. Fifty years ago, Hall (1959) expressed this very beautifully: “Culture hides much more than it reveals and, strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants”; or, in other words (Gitterman & Miller 1989:162), “what is ‘well known’ is often least known”. Importantly, cultural values can just as easily be ignored as communicative norms; however, once again, non-adherence increases the risk of standing out.

We are left with the *fourth* and last premise: “Different ways of speaking, different communicative styles can be explained and made sense of, in terms of *independently established* different cultural values and cultural priorities” (emphasis added). What is meant here is that it would be foolhardy to exclusively rely on the communicative norms generally adhered to within a culture to confirm once and for all the reality of certain cultural values. To lend the latter maximum credibility, it is necessary to come up with independent evidence, which is not immediately linked to any communicative norms. Such evidence may come from different sources, both linguistic and non-linguistic. In what follows, I focus on linguistic evidence.

### Learning catalysts

The hypothesis at the heart of this paper is that idiomatic expressions, key vocabulary and syntactic patterns, all of which are generally acquired sooner and more easily than norms and values, can act as catalysts for those who wish to get acquainted with ways of speaking and thinking that are different from those they are accustomed to. Indeed, the majority of values and norms which must be known to achieve success in exolingual speech events can be *matched up* with phrases, words and syntactic patterns that have the distinct advantage of being a lot easier to recognise. There is an important proviso, though: the more instantly recognisable “stuff” that languages are made up of needs to be thoughtfully used, and the dangers of hasty generalisation need to be averted (as was the case above, when reference was made to communicative norms and cultural values only, and *independent* evidence was called for to back up the reality of any values solely arrived at on the basis of the observation of divergent norms).

Let us start off with idiomatic phrases: they are undoubtedly, in many instances, the most striking candidate catalysts. French expressions such as *On va s'arranger*, *Débrouille-toi*, *Faire feu de tout bois* are numerous and common enough in daily usage to invite the hypothesis that *débrouillardise* (i.e. resourcefulness) is an important cultural value. But to conclude, once and for all, on the basis of these expressions, that *débrouillardise* is effectively a French cultural value would be presumptuous; it is at best a hypothesis in need of further corroboration, both linguistic and non-linguistic. As it turns out, relevant evidence is not hard to find (as demonstrated in Peeters forthcoming).

With respect to the lexicon, it can be said that there are, in all of the world's languages, a certain number of words – often referred to as *key words*, in the tradition of French lexicologist Georges Matoré (1953) – whose status differs from that of most other words in the lexicon. For us, they are quite simply words that are “more culturally laden” than others, words that assume, as it were, “more than their share of cultural work” (Jay 1998:4), that are “particularly important and revealing in a given culture” (Wierzbicka 1997:15-16). Some, like the term *fair go* in Australian English, are directly linked to a cultural value (Bigelow 1998:40); many others, such as the word *weekend*, again in Australian English, are more muted, but nonetheless enlightening, signposts (Peeters 2007).

Finally, in spite of being typically less salient than idiomatic phrases and key words, some productive syntactic patterns can undoubtedly catch the eye of the language learner, either because they do not exist in the learner's native language or are significantly less common, which automatically enhances their salience in the foreign language, or because they function differently. One of the most spectacular examples I am aware of in the languages I have worked on is the French pattern “Un X peut en cacher un autre” (‘One X can hide another one’), which is derived from the well-known warning sign at level crossings throughout France (*Un train peut en cacher un autre*), but which, nowadays, is used in a virtually limitless way with a variety of nouns referring to people as well as to objects, situations and abstract ideas. In Peeters (forthcoming), I formulate the hypothesis that this productive syntactic pattern is an immediate reflection of the French cultural value of *méfi-ance* (not so much ‘distrust’ or ‘mistrust’, as most translation dictionaries have it, but ‘wariness’, a virtue rather than a shortcoming), and I provide extensive additional, linguistic as well as non-linguistic, evidence in support of that hypothesis.

It is not impossible that, in some instances, an examination of candidate catalysts does not lead to tangible results. This is because there are no *objective* strategies which facilitate the identification of catalysts, and also because there is no *pre-determined* number of catalysts per language. Using the example of the non-native speaker who is offered something to drink and who either accepts saying *merci* (whereas *bien volontiers* was the phrase required) or declines saying *thank you* (whereas the appropriate formula to use was *no, thanks*), we can most certainly consider *merci* and

*thank you* to be potential learning catalysts. However, what kind of lesson about French and English cultural values can be drawn from the different usage patterns of these two routines? In the current state of our knowledge (or at least in the current state of this writer's knowledge), the answer is likely to disappoint: none whatsoever. As soon as someone will come up with a hypothesis, more evidence will have to be found, so that the hypothesis can be either confirmed, further improved on or rejected.

### Ethnolinguistics redefined

In the light of the previous remarks, we can now move on and identify a number of different pathways which could be deployed in the advanced foreign language classroom and will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the cultural values that appear to prevail among those who claim to belong to a particular speech community (e.g. the French, the Tuaregs, the Japanese...). Each of the pathways will be given its own name, to make it easier to navigate through the maze of what, for the want of a better term and regardless of previous usage, we might want to call *ethnolinguistics*. The aim of the "ethnolinguistic pathways model" is to illustrate how the detailed study of communicative behaviours, phrases, key words and productive syntactic patterns can lead to the discovery of putative cultural values which are then to become the subject of further investigation leading to either the confirmation or the rejection of their assumed status; and also how, through a detailed study of communicative behaviour, phrases, key words and productive syntactic patterns, cultural values typically associated with a particular linguistic community can be further corroborated.

Five different pathways are envisaged.

1. *Ethnopragmatics* aims at studying culturally specific communicative behaviours and communicative norms, relying on linguistic as well as non-linguistic evidence, with a view to discovering whether any cultural values, previously known or newly discovered, underpin these behaviours and norms. Values which were previously known will thus be better understood; the reality of newly discovered values will subsequently have to be proven via other means. Defined in this way, ethnopragmatics is a "successor" to what has been called (trans)cultural pragmatics (Peeters 2003b, 2004a) and is entirely compatible with ethnopragmatics as defined by Goddard (2002).<sup>5</sup>
2. *Ethnophraseology* (a term coined by Wierzbicka 1999) aims at studying culturally specific phrases and idioms, relying on linguistic as well as non-linguistic evidence, with a view to discovering whether any cultural values, previously known or newly discovered, underpin these phrases and idioms. Values which were previously known will thus be better understood; the reality of newly discovered values will subsequently have to be proven via other means.
3. *Ethnosemantics* aims at studying presumed culturally specific key words, relying on linguistic as well as non-linguistic evidence, with a view to discovering whether any cultural values, previously known or newly discovered, underpin these words. Values which were previously known will thus be better understood; the reality of newly discovered values will subsequently have to be proven via other means. De-

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<sup>5</sup> In more recent years, Goddard has published several other relevant papers, as well as an edited volume (Goddard 2006) where further literature is listed. Goddard himself places the beginnings of ethnopragmatics in the mid-eighties, associating it with the publication of Wierzbicka (1985), but the term is his.

## Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model

defined in this way, ethnosemantics is a “successor” to what has been called (trans)cultural semantics (Peeters 2003b, 2004a).

4. *Ethnosyntax* (a term coined by Wierzbicka 1979) aims at studying culturally specific productive syntactic patterns, relying on linguistic as well as non-linguistic evidence, with a view to discovering whether any cultural values, previously known or newly discovered, underpin these patterns. Values which were previously known will thus be better understood; the reality of newly discovered values will subsequently have to be proven via other means.
5. *Ethnoaxiology* aims at corroborating the reality of hypothetical cultural values commonly thought of as being defining features of the community they are usually associated with. The corroborative process is predicated on a search for linguistic as well as non-linguistic data in support of a presumed value. Defined in this way, ethnoaxiology is a “successor” to what has been called (trans)cultural axiology (Peeters 2003b, 2004a). An ethnoaxiological examination will often be preceded by one of the other approaches, but may also be carried out in its own right, independently of any preceding investigation.

Reliance on the *natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) approach* associated with the work of Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard and others is a prominent trait of each and every pathway within the model and therefore of the model at large. NSM is a culturally neutral, rigorous and maximally clear descriptive tool which, thanks to an empirically validated universal lexicon and grammar (translatable into the corresponding NSMs of other languages of the world without either loss or shift of meaning), allows to describe the meaning of culturally more specific words (including those that are the subject of ethnosemantics), but also other language data such as grammatical structures (ethnosyntax), communicative behaviours and norms (ethnopragmatics), cultural values (ethnoaxiology), and so on. For more details, see Goddard & Wierzbicka (2002), Peeters (2006) and Goddard (2008).

In what follows, we provide, for each of the pathways, a tentative structure and a list of indicative questions that might be usefully asked. The structures and the questions will however vary, depending on each particular assignment. The number of pathways itself is not deemed to be definitive. Ethnolinguistics as defined here is by its very nature work in progress.

### 1.1. Ethnopragmatics: the study of communicative behaviours and norms

Step 1: Search of tangible evidence for the reality of a putative communicative behaviour

- Are there any relevant accounts or assertions from either internal or external observers?
- Are there any other (non-linguistic) data pointing to the importance (i.e. the cultural salience) of the communicative behaviour? Is it referred to in titles or slogans, in commercials, on posters, etc.?

Step 2: “Translation” of step 1 findings into NSM

Step 3: Further corroboration based on *linguistic* data

- Are there any key words that may be associated with the communicative behaviour under observation?
- Are there any phrases or idioms that refer to it?
- Which underlying communicative norms appear to govern the behaviour and which aspects of it (spatial, temporal...) do they govern? On what basis can these norms be identified?

## Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model

Step 4: Identification of the (previously known or unknown) cultural value which appears to underpin the communicative behaviour and the corresponding communicative norm(s)

Step 5: (may be replaced by a full-fledged ethnoaxiological study): Summary list of other linguistic evidence (to be subjected to subsequent rigorous analysis) in support of the value identified in the previous step

### 1.2. Ethnophraseology: the study of phrases and idioms

Step 1: Search of tangible evidence for the cultural salience of the phrase or idiom

- Are there any relevant accounts or assertions from either internal or external observers?
- Are there any other (non-linguistic) data pointing to the importance (i.e. the cultural salience) of the phrase or idiom? Is it referred to in titles or slogans, in commercials, on posters, etc.?

Step 2: “Translation” of the phrase or idiom into NSM

Step 3: Detailed *linguistic* analysis of the phrase or idiom and of its usage

- Are any culturally relevant observations contained within the language’s dictionaries?
- How and when is the phrase or idiom used in linguistic interaction?
- Is it possible to dissect the phrase or idiom in an attempt to better understand its conditions of use?

Step 4: Identification of the (previously known or unknown) cultural value which appears to underpin the phrase or idiom

Step 5: (may be replaced by a full-fledged ethnoaxiological study): Summary list of other linguistic evidence (to be subjected to subsequent rigorous analysis) in support of the value identified in the previous step

### 1.3. Ethnosemantics: the study of key words

Step 1: Search of tangible evidence for the status of key word

- Are there any relevant accounts or assertions from either internal or external observers?
- Are there any expressions, phrases, idioms, concepts, etc. in which the word appears? What are their meanings and how are they used?
- Are there any other (non-linguistic) data pointing to the importance (i.e. the cultural salience) of the word? Is it referred to in titles or slogans, in commercials, on posters, etc.?
- Are there any derived words which underscore the importance of the key word in the language?

Step 2: “Translation” of the key word into NSM

Step 3: Corroboration by means of independent (linguistic and non-linguistic) evidence

- Are any culturally relevant observations contained within the language’s dictionaries?
- Are there any expressions, phrases, idioms that can be associated with the key word (even though it is not part of them)? What are their meanings and how are they used?
- If the key word appears in specific concepts, are there any accounts within the community of the importance or even the objective reality of these concepts?

Step 4: Identification of the (previously known or unknown) cultural value which appears to underpin the key word

## Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model

Step 5: (may be replaced by a full-fledged ethnoaxiological study): Summary list of other linguistic evidence (to be subjected to subsequent rigorous analysis) in support of the value identified in the previous step

### 1.4. Ethnosyntax: the study of productive syntactic patterns

Step 1: Search of tangible evidence for the productivity of the syntactic pattern

- Are there any relevant accounts or assertions from either internal or external observers?
- Are there any other (non-linguistic) data pointing to the importance (i.e. the cultural salience) of the pattern? Is it used in titles or slogans, in commercials, on posters, etc.?

Step 2: Detailed analysis of the syntactic pattern and of its usage

- How and when is the syntactic pattern used in linguistic interaction?
- Is it possible to dissect the pattern in an attempt to better understand its conditions of use?

Step 3: “Translation” of the syntactic pattern into NSM

Step 4: Identification of the (previously known or unknown) cultural value which appears to underpin the pattern

Step 5: (may be replaced by a full-fledged ethnoaxiological study): Summary list of other linguistic evidence (to be subjected to subsequent rigorous analysis) in support of the value identified in the previous step

### 1.5. Ethnoaxiology: the corroboration of cultural values

Step 1: “Translation” of first impressions into NSM

Step 2: Reminder of tangible (non-linguistic) evidence for the status of cultural value, e.g. relevant accounts or assertions from either internal or external observers, and social phenomena which underscore its importance

Step 3: Further corroboration based on *linguistic* data and behaviours

- Do any phrases, idioms, proverbs, sayings, etc. either support the presumed value or highlight the undesirability of behaviours which are not in line with it?
- Are there any key words that may be positively linked with the presumed cultural value?
- Are there any communicative norms that may be positively linked with the presumed cultural value?

### Final remarks

Within the NSM approach, which is a defining feature of the ethnolinguistic pathways model presented here, the terms *ethnophraseology* and *ethnosemantics* have been used once or twice, the terms *ethnopragmatics* and *ethnosyntax* are firmly established, and the term *ethnoaxiology* is new. This is not to say that, beyond the NSM approach, those terms that are already in use are understood as they are here: *ethnosemantics*, *ethnopragmatics* and *ethnosyntax* are relatively widespread labels that are commonly used elsewhere, be it in linguistics, or in areas such as psychiatry, psychology, anthropology or ethnology. Definitions had therefore to be provided. They show, among other things, that the “five ethnos” that make up the model are far from mutually exclusive. They complement one another, so much so that nothing should prevent anyone from pursuing all of them in turn. None of the pathways is logically prior to any of the others, and none has preferred status. One and the same individual can be an ethnopragmaticist, an ethnophraseologist, an ethnosemanticist, an

### **Language and cultural values the ethnolinguistic pathways model**

ethnosyntactician and an ethnoaxiologist, start and finish no matter where, switch as often as is necessary, change directions anytime. As mentioned previously, ethnolinguistics as defined here is work in progress; it is hoped that advanced language learners and researchers alike may find something of interest in the ethnolinguistic pathways model, and that it may facilitate their exploration of foreign cultural values through the medium of the language they are either acquiring or investigating.

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