

# Chapter 1

## Ethnopragmatics: a new paradigm

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### 1. Situating ethnopragmatics

For many years the dominant paradigm in linguistic pragmatics was strongly universalist: human communication was seen as largely governed by a rich and substantive inventory of universal principles. Variation between cultures was described in terms of local adjustments to and local construals of the presumed pan-human universals of communication. Different versions of this universalist paradigm are represented in works such as Grice (1975), Brown and Levinson (1978), Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), Sperber and Wilson (1995), among others. Universalist pragmatics necessarily imposes an “external” perspective on the description of the speech practices of any particular local culture, since the basic descriptive parameters have been decided in advance without reference to that local culture. Furthermore, these descriptive parameters – such as positive and negative politeness, the maxims of quality and quantity, “relevance”, collectivism and individualism, etc. – are of such an abstract and technical nature they would be unrecognisable to the people of the culture being described. At the same time, universalist pragmatics carries with it the assumption that local variations are somehow minor when compared with the grand groundplan of “human” communication.

Fortunately, concern with culture-internal accounts of speech practices and with the profound “cultural shaping” of speech practices has refused to go away over the long period of universalist dominance. It was kept alive by research trends such as the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1968; Bauman and Sherzer eds 1974; Gumperz and Hymes eds 1986), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), linguistic anthropology (cf. Duranti 1997), and the cross-cultural pragmatics of Anna Wierzbicka (1985, 2003a) and colleagues. In recent years, there are signs that the tide has been turning, as the weaknesses of the universalist paradigm, especially its ethnocentrism,

terminological slipperiness and descriptive inadequacy, have attracted mounting criticism (Ochs Keenan 1976; Irvine 1979; Sohn 1983; Matsumoto 1988; Ide 1989; Wierzbicka 2003a; Janney and Arndt 1993; Clyne 1994: 176–201; Davis 1998). Nevertheless, the field of pragmatics as a whole still suffers from a remarkable degree of “culture blindness”.<sup>1</sup>

In sharp contrast, the studies in this volume start from the premise that speech practices are best understood from a culture-internal perspective. Focusing on examples from many different cultural locations, the contributing authors ask not only: “What is distinctive about these particular ways of speaking?”, but also: “Why – from their own point of view – do the people concerned speak in these particular ways? What sense does it make to them?” In addition to this common objective, the contributors share a common methodology based on two decades work in cross-linguistic semantics, and a common concern for grounding in linguistic evidence. Together, this three-fold combination – objective, methodology, and evidence base – constitutes a venture which is distinctive enough to warrant a new term: “ethnopragmatics” (cf. Goddard 2002a, 2002b, 2004a).<sup>2</sup>

Ethnopragmatics is necessarily intertwined with cross-linguistic semantics because the whole idea is to understand speech practices in terms which make sense to the people concerned, i.e., in terms of indigenous values, beliefs and attitudes, social categories, emotions, and so on. For example, much can be understood about Malay ways of speaking by reference to the Malay concepts of *malu* ‘shame, sense of propriety’ and *maruah* ‘personal dignity’ (Goddard 1996, 1997). Similarly, the Japanese concepts of *wa* ‘harmony’ and *omoiyari* ‘empathy’, the Yankunytjatjara concept of *kunta* ‘shame, sense of being out of place’, and the (Anglo) English concepts of being *fair* and *reasonable* are essential to an ethnopragmatic understanding of ways of speaking in their respective cultures (Travis 1998; Goddard 1992; Wierzbicka 2006). Such concepts have been aptly termed cultural key words (Wierzbicka 1997a). Since they are the concepts within which indigenous cultural psychology is framed, ethnopragmatics is compatible with the insight from cultural psychology (Shweder 1991, 1993, 2004) that people in different cultures speak differently because they think differently, feel differently, and relate differently to other people. As Clyne (1994: 3) puts it: “cultural values constitute ‘hidden’ meanings underlying discourse structures.”

To understand and explicate the key ethnopragmatic concepts of another culture, however, is no easy matter, precisely because of their embeddedness within their own language. Simple glosses such as those used in the

previous paragraph (e.g., *maruah* ‘personal dignity’, *wa* ‘harmony’) are hopelessly inadequate. How then can culture-specific discourse practices be understood from an insider perspective, while at the same time articulating this understanding in terms which will be clear and intelligible to outsiders from other languages and cultures? The contributors share the conviction that the solution to this problem is provided by the natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) approach originated by Anna Wierzbicka, which employs simple culturally-shared meanings (semantic primes) as its vocabulary of semantic and pragmatic description.

The natural semantic metalanguage theory (Wierzbicka 1996a; Goddard and Wierzbicka eds 1994, 2002; Goddard 1998; Goddard ed. in press) is based on evidence supporting the view that, despite their enormous differences, all languages share a small but stable core of simple shared meanings (semantic primes), that these meanings have concrete linguistic exponents as words or word-like expressions in all languages, and that they share a universal grammar of combination, valency, and complementation. That is, in any natural language one can isolate a small vocabulary and grammar which has precise equivalents in all other languages. The number of semantic primes appears to be in the low-sixties. Examples include the primary meanings of the English words: *someone/person, something/thing, people, say, words, do, think, want, good, bad, if, can* and *because*. Semantic primes can be combined, according to grammatical patterns which also appear to be universal, to form simple phrases and sentences such as: ‘people think that this is good’, ‘it is bad if someone says something like this’, ‘if you do something like this, people will think something bad about you’, and so on. The words and grammar of the natural semantic metalanguage jointly constitute a surprisingly flexible and expressive “mini-language”.

The full set of semantic primes is listed in Table 1. Comparable tables could now be adduced for a wide range of languages, and in principle, for any language. It is impossible here to review the large body of research exploring the lexical and grammatical properties of semantic primes in many languages. It can be mentioned, however, that detailed “whole meta-language” studies have been carried out for English, Polish, Malay, Lao, Mandarin Chinese, Mbula, Spanish, Korean, and East Cree, and more selective studies on French, Italian, Russian, Amharic, Japanese, Ewe, Yankunytjatjara, and Hawaiian Creole English, among other languages; see the chapters in Goddard and Wierzbicka (eds 1994, 2002) as well as Yoon (2003), Maher (2000), Stanwood (1999), Amberber (2003, in press), Junker (2003, in press) and Junker and Blacksmith (in press).

*Table 1.* Table of semantic primes<sup>3</sup>

Substantives:	I, YOU, SOMEONE/PERSON, SOMETHING/THING, PEOPLE, BODY
Relational substantives:	KIND, PART
Determiners:	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER/ELSE
Quantifiers:	ONE, TWO, MUCH/MANY, SOME, ALL
Evaluators:	GOOD, BAD
Descriptors:	BIG, SMALL
Mental/experiential predicates:	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
Speech:	SAY, WORDS, TRUE
Actions, events, movement, contact:	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH
Location, existence, possession, specification:	BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS/EXIST, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)
Life and death:	LIVE, DIE
Time:	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
Space:	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
Logical concepts:	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
Augmentor, intensifier:	VERY, MORE
Similarity:	LIKE

Notes: • primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes)  
 • exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes • they can be formally, i.e., morphologically, complex • they can have different morphosyntactic properties, including word-class, in different languages • they can have combinatorial variants (allolexes) • each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

Unlike complex English-specific terms (such as ‘politeness’, ‘directness’, ‘harmony’, ‘collectivism’, etc.) the universal mini-language of semantic primes can be safely used as a common code for cross-linguistic semantics and for ethnopragmatics, free from the danger of “terminological ethnocentrism”. As the distinguished anthropologist Roy D’Andrade (2001: 246) remarks, the natural semantic metalanguage: “offers a potential means to ground all complex concepts in ordinary language and translate concepts from one language to another without loss or distortion in meaning”.

## 2. Cultural scripts

One of the key techniques for ethnopragmatic description, used extensively by contributors to this volume, is the “cultural script”. Essentially, this refers to a statement – framed largely or entirely within the non-ethnocentric metalanguage of semantic primes – of some particular attitude, evaluation, or assumption which is hypothesised to be widely known and shared among people of a given speech community. The earliest explicit statement of the cultural scripts approach can be found in an article by Anna Wierzbicka published in 1994, though the roots of the approach are evident in her landmark volume *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics* (first published 1991, reissued 2003). Since then, the cultural scripts approach has been explored and refined via studies of a growing number of languages and cultures, most recently in the edited collection *Cultural Scripts* (Goddard and Wierzbicka eds 2004). A sample of this work is tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample of previous studies using cultural scripts

Language	Publication details	Related publications
“Anglo” English varieties	Peeters (1999, 2000), Wierzbicka (2002b, 2006)	Peeters (2004), Béal (1990, 1992, 1993, 1994), Stollznow (2004), Wierzbicka (1985, 1992: Ch 11, 1997a: Ch 5)
Chinese	Wierzbicka (1996c), Ye (2004a, b)	Ye (2001, 2002), Kornacki (1995, 2001)
Ewe	Ameka (1994), Ameka/ Breedveld (2004)	Ameka (1987, 2002)
French, Spanish, German	Peeters (1999, 2000), Travis (2004), Wierzbicka (1998a)	Béal (1990, 1992, 1993, 1994), Travis (1998a, 2002), Durst (2001), Wierzbicka (1999: Ch 3)
Japanese	Wierzbicka (1996b), Hasada (1996)	Asano (2003), Hasada (1998, 2001, 2002), Travis (1998b), Wierzbicka (1997b: Ch 6)
Korean	Yoon (2004a)	Yoon (2003, 2004b)
Malay	Goddard (1997, 2000, 2002b, 2004a)	Goddard (1994, 1995, 1996, 2001a, b, 2002b)
Polish, Russian	Wierzbicka (1999: Ch 5–6, 2002a)	Wierzbicka (1985, 1992: Ch 12, 1997a: Ch 3- 4, 1997b, 1998b, c, 2001), Gladkova (2005, to appear)
Singapore English	Wong (2004a)	Besemeres/Wierzbicka (2003), Wierzbicka (2003a, b), Wong (2004b, c, 2005)

Cultural scripts exist at different levels of generality, and may relate to different aspects of thinking, speaking, and behaviour. To illustrate, script [A] below is arguably a high-level script (sometimes termed a “master script”) of Anglo culture, expressing a cultural preference for something like personal autonomy (cf. Wierzbicka 2003a, this volume). Script [B] is arguably a master script of Russian culture, expressing a cultural endorsement of, roughly speaking, an “expressive” stance in speech and action (Wierzbicka 2002a). In both cases, it can be argued that the high-level concern captured in these scripts is played out in detail by way of a whole family of related speech-practices in the Anglo and Russian speech cultures. High level scripts such as these are often closely associated with cultural key words, such as English *freedom* (and *free*) and Russian *iskrennost'* (roughly ‘sincerity’), respectively.

[A] *A high-level Anglo cultural script connected with “personal autonomy”*

people think like this:

when a person does something, it is good if this person can think about it like this:

“I am doing this because I want to do it”

[B] *A high-level Russian cultural script connected with “expressiveness”*

people think like this:

it is good if a person wants other people to know what this person thinks

it is good if a person wants other people to know what this person feels

Needless to say, societies are heterogeneous, and not every member of Anglo or Russian society would accept or endorse scripts [A] and [B]. However, the claim is that even those who do not personally identify with the content of a script are nonetheless familiar with it, i.e., that it forms part of the interpretative backdrop to discourse and social behaviour in a particular cultural context.<sup>4</sup>

It can be seen that both scripts are hinged around evaluative components: ‘it is good if —’. Evaluative components can also take the form ‘it is not good if —’, ‘it is bad if —’, ‘it is not bad if —’, etc.; or other variants such as ‘it can be good if —’ and ‘it can be bad if —’. Many cultural scripts are of this general format. Another kind of framing component, useful for other scripts and in other contexts, concerns people’s perceptions of what they can and can’t do: ‘I can say (think, do, etc.) —’ and ‘I can’t say (think, do, etc.) —’. Lower-level, more specific, scripts are often introduced by ‘when’-components and ‘if’-components, representing relevant

aspects of social context. Script [C], for example, is a lower-level script linked with Anglo “personal autonomy”. It expresses the Anglo distaste for abrupt directives, reflected in many ways in the phraseology and discourse patterns of English (Wierzbicka, this volume).

[C] *An Anglo cultural script for avoiding “strong” directives*

people think like this:  
 when I want someone to do something,  
 it is not good if I say something like this to this person:  
 “I want you to do it  
 I think that you will do it because of this”

Mere possession of a common language does not mean that people necessarily share all their cultural scripts and associated ethnopragmatic behaviours. Particularly with a global language such as English, there are marked regional and social variations, as one would expect of societies with different histories and lived experiences. The cultural scripts of “non-Anglo” English-speaking societies can differ extensively from Anglo English varieties. Wong (2004a) shows that Singapore English, for example, has no cultural scripts endorsing Anglo-style personal autonomy in the style of scripts [A] and [C], and, consequently, that Singapore English speakers employ a very different interactional style so far as directives are concerned.

Even different varieties of Anglo English, such as Australian English, British English, and American English, may have significantly different cultural scripts in certain respects. For example, Wierzbicka (1999: Ch 6) has argued that Anglo-American English, even more than other varieties of Anglo English, values and encourages the display of ‘good feelings’ that one may not necessarily feel, and, conversely, the suppression of ‘bad feelings’ whose display may be seen as serving no useful purpose or as unpleasant for other people. This is reflected, for example, in what has been called the American ‘Smile Code’ (Klos Sokol 1997: 117): “In American culture, you don’t advertise your daily headaches; it’s bad form; so you turn up the corners of the mouth – or at least try – according to the Smile Code.” Another reflection of this attitude is the ubiquitous presence of the word *great* in American discourse (cf. Wolfson 1983: 93), both as a modifier (especially of the verb *to look*, e.g., *You look great!* or *Your X (hair, garden, apartment, etc.) looks great!*) and as a “response particle”, e.g., *That’s great!* or *Great!* The importance of positive feelings is also reflected in the key role of the adjective *happy* in American discourse, used, among other

things, as a yardstick for psychological well-being and social adjustment (Bellah et al. 1985: 115). To capture these attitudes, in part, Wierzbicka has proposed the “verbal cheerfulness” script given in [D].

[D] *An Anglo-American cultural script for “cheerfulness” in verbal interactions*

people think like this:  
 when I say something to other people,  
     it is good if these people think that I feel something good  
     it is not good if these people think that I feel something bad

Scripts like the one presented in [D] touch upon the area sometimes termed “communicative style”. And indeed, a significant part of the corpus of work on cultural scripts concerns communicative styles and strategies in different languages and cultures. As another example, script [E] below has been proposed as one of a suite of Malay cultural scripts enjoining caution in speech and action generally, and in particular, caution about other people’s feelings (Goddard 1997, 2000). Many traditional Malay sayings and expressions echo this theme, such as *jaga hati orang* ‘look after people’s feelings’, *memilihara perasaan* ‘looking after feelings’, and *bertimbang perasaan* ‘weighing feelings’. One cultural commentator’s list of Malay values includes the following: “showing consideration and concern, anticipating the other... and, above all, being sensitive to the other person” (Wilson 1967: 132); another stresses “the great emphasis placed on harmonious personal relations in Malay culture” (Rogers 1993: 30).

[E] *A Malay cultural script for verbal caution about others’ feelings*

people think like this:  
 it is not good if when I say something to someone,  
     this person feels something bad because of it  
 because of this, when I want to say something to someone,  
     it is good if I think about it for some time before I say it

To a certain extent, this script overlaps with an Anglo script which encourages people not to “hurt other people’s feelings” unnecessarily. However, the Malay script in [E] goes beyond this to spell out a specific strategy – namely, a period of premeditation before saying anything, and this creates a quite different communicative mode to Anglo ways of speaking, which privilege something like “personal expression” for its own sake.



In introducing the notion of cultural scripts at the beginning of this section, I said that they were framed “largely or entirely” in the metalanguage of semantic primes. This qualification was necessary because it has recently become apparent that to formulate certain kinds of cultural scripts optimally requires not only semantic primes, but also certain “semantic molecules”. Semantic molecules are complex word-meanings which function as chunks or units in cultural scripts and/or semantic explications. Many cultural scripts must include as semantic molecules the concepts of ‘men’, ‘women’ and ‘children’; for example, the rules governing the usage of T/V pronoun forms and other terms of address in European languages (Wierzbicka 2004).

Script [F] gives a similar example. According to Ameka and Breedveld (2004), this is an “areal cultural script” shared by many languages of West Africa. It simply specifies that one cannot say a person’s name, when speaking to a person, if this person is not thought of as a child. In this script, the terms ‘child’ and ‘name’ are both semantic molecules (and are marked as such by the notation [M]).

[F] *A West African cultural script for name avoidance in adult address*

people think like this:

if I think about someone like this: “this person is not a child [M]”

when I want to say something to this person, I can’t say this person’s name [M]

The semantic molecules ‘men’, ‘women’ and ‘children’ may well be universal or near-universal in the world’s languages, since they seem to represent a basic and widely shared system of social categorisation (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka to appear). It is clear, however, that cultural scripts may also draw on language-specific semantic molecules, representing language-and-culture-specific social categorisations. For example, Yoon (2004a) has shown that certain Korean scripts make reference to the Korean social category *noin* (roughly) ‘respected old people’. The word *noin* is a cultural key word of Korean. Script [G] captures the culturally expected attitude of younger Koreans when they are with *noin* (Yoon 2004a). This includes seeing *noin* as “above” them,<sup>5</sup> being aware of verbal and nonverbal constraints, a perceived inability to defy the expressed wishes of old people (and even a positive attitude towards complying with their will), and the perceived need for caution in order to avoid causing them any negative feelings.

[G] *A Korean cultural script for interacting with noin*

people think like this:  
 when I am with some people, if these people are *noin* [M] I have to think like this:  
 “these people are not people like me, these people are people above me  
 because I am with these people now I cannot do some things, I cannot say  
 some things, I cannot say some words  
 if these people say to me: ‘I want you to do something’, I can’t say to them:  
 ‘I don’t want to do it’  
 if these people want me to do something, it will be good if I do it  
 it will be very bad if these people feel something bad because of me”

In a similar vein, Ye (2004a) has shown that many Chinese interactional norms hinge on the distinction between the Chinese social categories of *shúrén* (roughly) ‘an acquaintance, someone known personally’ and *shēngrén* (roughly) ‘a stranger, a non-acquaintance’. Script [H] shows one such script. It sets out the perceived obligation, in Chinese society, to enact a certain kind of greeting routine (*dǎ zhāohu*), when meeting after some time with people who are *shúrén*. It should be clear at this point that cultural scripts can “reach down” to very specific details of communicative practice, such as name avoidance, greeting routines, responses to particular conversational moves, and the like. Naturally, these more specific scripts are often longer and more involved than higher-level scripts.

[H] *A Chinese cultural script for dǎ zhāohu routine with shúrén*

people think like this:  
 when I see a *shúrén* [M], if I have not seen this person for some time  
 I have to say something like this to this person:  
 “I see you now  
 because of this I know that you are doing something now  
 I want to know more about it”  
 if I say this, this person can think because of this that I feel something good towards  
 this person  
 if I don’t say this, this person can think that I feel something bad towards this person  
 I don’t have to say something like this to a person if this person is not a *shúrén* [M]

Cultural scripts can be used to develop improved descriptions and interpretations of “rhetorical” speech practices such as, to use conventional labels, active metaphor, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, euphemism, and so on (Goddard 2004b; Wierzbicka 2002b, 2002c, 2004). The problem with the conventional labels is that they gloss over major differences between languages and between contexts. Just as there is no unitary phenomenon of

“directness” in terms of which speech styles in different languages can be compared, neither is there any unitary phenomenon of “metaphor” or “irony”. The concept of “metaphor”, for example, is an artefact of a particular cultural tradition which can be traced back to classical Greek rhetoric. It encapsulates a complex meaning which lacks precise equivalents in many – probably most – of the world’s languages. For example, the Malay term *kiasan* includes allusion and innuendo, as well as metaphor and simile; another term *ibarat* can be used not only about metaphors but also about didactic analogies, fables, and illustrative examples. Furthermore, there are cultures, such as the Yankunytjatjara of Central Australia, in which active metaphorising is marginal at best (Goddard 2004b).

Cultural scripts allow us to “unpack” culturally shared understandings of particular “ways with words” from an insider perspective, without recourse to such technical and language-specific labels. Goddard (2004b) has argued, for example, that one type of English metaphor (the traditional “active metaphor”) can be understood in terms of script [I] below (presented in a revised and improved version). This script sums up a chunk of cultural common knowledge about Anglo speech practices; namely, that speakers sometimes knowingly use words which can express a meaning different to the intended meaning, with a view to making the listener think about what is being said; in more abstract terms, in the interests of securing cognitive engagement from the listener. The speech practice described in script [I] is not universal, but is linked with culture-specific goals of expressiveness, originality, and individuality.

[I] *An Anglo cultural script about active metaphorising and related speech practices*

people think like this:

sometimes when a person wants to say something about something,  
this person says it with some words, not with other words,

because this person thinks like this:

“I know that these words can say something else

I want to say it with these words because if I say it like this, people will have to  
think about it

I want this”

it can be good if a person can say things in this way

Other work on “rhetorical” speech practices includes the work of Wierzbicka (2004, 2002c) on “dramatic hyperbole” in Biblical Hebrew, and in Arabic discourse. The application of the cultural scripts approach

promises to bring improved clarity and precision to the field of comparative rhetoric, a field which, as Kennedy (1998) observes, is almost entirely lacking in theoretical and methodological underpinnings.

Cultural scripts are not necessarily confined to matters directly related to ways of speaking, or more generally, to communication. They may also be employed to articulate cultural preferences for particular ways of thinking and feeling; in other words, to describe aspects of cognitive style and emotional style. For example, Wierzbicka (1999: Ch 6) has argued that Anglo-American culture favours a cognitive stance which may be dubbed “positive thinking” (using a common ethno-description of the culture concerned). It can be partially portrayed as in script [J]. Traditional Chinese culture, by contrast, encouraged an attitude which can be partially captured in the “Middle Way” script given in [K], associated with Buddhism and Confucianism (Wierzbicka 1993).

[J] *An Anglo-American cultural script for “positive thinking”*

people think like this:  
 it is good if a person can often think that something good will happen  
 it is good if a person can often feel something good because of this

[K] *A Chinese cultural script for the philosophy of the “Middle Way”*

people think like this:  
 when something very bad happens to a person, it is good if this person thinks like this:  
 “something good can happen to me afterwards because of this”  
 if a person thinks like this, this person will not feel something very bad  
 this is good  
 when something very good happens to a person, it is good if this person thinks like this:  
 “something bad can happen to me afterwards because of this”  
 if a person thinks like this, this person will not feel something very good  
 this is good

Cultural scripts can also be employed to spell out widespread cultural beliefs – beliefs which may be profoundly explanatory of aspects of communicative practice. The following examples of “belief scripts” are introduced with the same ‘people think like this: — ’ component as the scripts we have seen so far. The difference is that the content they express is not presented in an evaluative form (i.e., in components involving ‘it is good/bad if...’), but in a “plain” statement-like form.<sup>6</sup>

Goddard (1997) has argued that traditional Malay culture includes a high-level “belief script” concerned with the concept of *balasan*, a noun

derived from the verb *balas* ‘to return (to someone), return in kind’. It is presented in [L]. Numerous traditional sayings convey the message that a person’s deeds, whether good or bad, will be repaid in kind: *Setiap perbuatan, baik atau jahat, akan ada balasan* ‘every deed, whether good or wrong, will have its *balasan*’. This script leaves it open as to whether the *balasan* ‘return’ is likely to come from other people, or in the form of an apparently inexplicable event (which can be interpreted as the will of God), or whether the *balasan* might not be apparent until the afterlife. As can easily be imagined, a script like [L] has far-reaching implications for attitudes and behaviours.

[L] *A Malay cultural script on balasan “return in kind” for one’s deeds*

people think like this:

good things will happen to a person if this person does good things

bad things will happen to a person if this person does bad things

According to Ameka (1987; cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 1997), Ewe culture includes a cultural belief that good things cannot happen to people without the intervention of supernatural beings, such as ancestral spirits or local divinities, and, ultimately God (*Máwú*). Such a belief can be modelled as follows.

[M] *An Ewe cultural script on the efficacious role of supernatural beings*

people think like this:

good things cannot happen to a person

if beings of another kind don’t do some things

It is on account of this belief, Ameka argues, that verbal routines used in response to the news that various ‘good things’ have happened to a person include expressions such as: *Ŋúwò núwó wɔ dɔ!* ‘Beings around you have worked!’, *Máwú wɔ dɔ!* ‘God has worked!’, and *Tɔgbéwó wɔ dɔ!* ‘Ancestors have worked!’

The two previous scripts were concerned with how things happen in the world. Another class of belief scripts which can be particularly pertinent to people’s ways of speaking and interacting can be termed “social models”; i.e., widely shared representations about what people are like, about what kinds of people there are, about what kinds of relations exist between people, and so on. Yoon (2004a) has proposed a widely shared script of this kind for Korean culture. It is given, in a slightly adapted form,<sup>7</sup> in [N]

below. It presents a picture of society as consisting, broadly speaking, of two groups. One of these groups consists of ‘people above me’; and these people are seen as necessarily ‘people not like me’. The other group, i.e., those who are ‘people not above me’, is further seen as apportioned between some who are ‘people like me’ and others who are ‘people below me’. The script portrays what one may term a “vertical” model of society.

[N] *A Korean cultural script for a “vertical” model of society*

people think like this:  
 some people are people above me, they are not people like me  
 other people are people not above me  
 some of these other people are people like me  
 some of these other people are people below me

The broad two-way division corresponds to the major cleavage in the highly elaborated Korean system of speech styles and honorification. One uses *contaymal* (polite, respectful language) with ‘people above me’ and *panmal* (plain, non-respectful language, lit: half language) with others (cf. Lee and Ramsey 2000). As described above, respected elder people (Korean *noin*) necessarily fall into the “above” category, but so do many others, including categories of people such as teachers and doctors.

Cultural scripts can also deal with nonverbal communicative practices, as indicated by the reference above to the possibility of different cultural functions of smiling. The semantics and ethnopragmatics of facial expressions have been discussed by Wierzbicka (1999: Ch 4, 1995), Hasada (1996), and Ye (2004b). Ye’s contribution to the present volume is an important addition to this growing literature. Doubtless a great deal remains to be explored in this area, including applications of the cultural scripts approach to other nonverbal practices, such as gestures and gesturing, body postures, touching and proxemics, voice and vocalisation styles, and so on.

### 3. Linguistic evidence for ethnopragmatics

Ethnopragsmatics does not disregard nonlinguistic evidence, such as that produced in ethnographic and sociological studies. On the contrary, such evidence can be very helpful. However, ethnopragsmatics places particular emphasis upon linguistic evidence, for three reasons. The first is that linguistic evidence – the evidence of usage – is anchored in everyday dis-

course, in routine daily communicative practice. Common words and expressions, phraseological patterns, interactional routines, and the like, are part of the texture of everyday life. Second, linguistic usage is for the most part unconscious, in the sense that it is not subject to deliberate monitoring and adjustment. In a very real sense, linguistic usage functions as an “index” of routine ways of thinking (cf. Boas 1911; Whorf 1956; Slobin 1996, 2000). In recent times, the increasing availability of large corpora is making the evidence of linguistic usage more accessible and more detailed than ever before.

The third reason for the importance attached to linguistic evidence is that, if analysed with appropriate tools, linguistic evidence allows us to stay close to an insider perspective. Ethnographic and sociological studies, on the other hand, often “re-code” indigenous terms and viewpoints into those of the external observer, thereby losing touch with the indigenous viewpoint. For example, sociologist Geert Hofstede (1997: 28) reported that Malaysia ranked most highly of 53 countries and regions on his “power distance index”, which indicates the extent to which “less powerful” individuals expect to and are willing to obey authority. From an ethnopragmatic perspective it is striking how distant this formulation is from ordinary Malay ways of speaking about social relationships, which are typically framed not in terms of “power” (Malay *kuasa*), but in terms of the cultural key word *hormat* (roughly) “respect” (Goddard 2000).

Many different kinds of linguistic evidence have been used in the developing literature on ethnopragmatics. Some critics have seen in this wide range of evidence types a lack of systematicity. It is true that there is in ethnopragmatics, as in many fields of inquiry, a danger of selective use of evidence. On the other hand, given the very wide range of cultural types, language types, and communicative practices, it is misguided to expect that any set inventory of evidence types would work equally well for all languages. Even so, it may be helpful to itemise some of the kinds of linguistic evidence which have proved valuable to date. It goes without saying that any such evidence has to be interpreted with the aid of appropriate analytical methods – above all, with sound methods of semantic analysis.

– *Cultural key words* (cf. Wierzbicka 1992: Ch 1, 1997a, 2006; Goddard 2000, 2001a, b; Peeters 2000, 2004; Yoon 2004b; Ye to appear). Terms for values, social categories, ethnopsychological constructs, and ethnophilosophical terms have proved particularly fruitful sources, but cultural key words can also turn up in unexpected places, as with the Australian English

swearword and discourse marker *bloody* (Wierzbicka 2002b). It is of course important to be wary of singling out any term as “the” cultural Rosetta Stone. No matter how revealing, any single key word must necessarily give an unbalanced picture of the complexities and cross-currents in any culture.

– *Proverbs and common sayings*. These often tap into the same layer of “cultural common sense” as key words.

– *Common words and expressions*. No matter how humble, these can often be a revealing index of the tenor of ordinary discourse, especially if frequency data is available from corpora, e.g., the high frequency of Russian expressions for ‘absolutely’ and similar meanings in combination with judgements and evaluations (Wierzbicka 1992: Ch 12).

– *Words for speech acts and genres*. These represent a kind of “cultural catalogue” of interaction types. Languages differ markedly, however, in the number and nature of their speech act inventories (Wierzbicka 1985, 1987, 2003a: Ch 2, Ch 5; Goddard 2004c, 2002b; Béal 1990, 1994).

– *Terms of address*; such as various pronouns, titles, quasi-kin terms, designations by profession or role, terms of endearment or familiarity, etc. (Wierzbicka 1992: Ch 7–8).

– *Interactional routines*; such as greetings and partings, appropriate things to say (if anything) when good things happen, when bad things happen, when someone does something good for one, etc. (Wierzbicka 2003a: Ch 4; Ameka 1987, 1994, 1999; Ameka and Breedveld 2004; Béal 1992, 1993).

– *Phraseological patterns*; such as the English “interrogative imperatives” and tag questions, or the numerous Russian expressions based on “necessity” and “obligation” (Wierzbicka 1992: Ch 12, 2003a: Ch 2).

– *Patterns of “turn taking” and other conversational management strategies*; such as preferences for non-interruption, for overlap, for incomplete or elliptical expressions, etc. (Peeters 2000; cf. Béal 1992, 1993).

– *Derivational morphology expressive of social meanings*; such as interpersonal “warmth”, “respect”, etc; including diminutives and honorifics (Wierzbicka 1992: Ch 7–8; Travis 2004; Yoon 2004a)

– *Discourse particles and interjections* (Ameka ed. 1992; Asano 2003; Wierzbicka 2002b, 2003a: Ch 8; Wong 2004a).

To this non-exhaustive list of valuable sources of evidence for ethno-pragmatic analysis, one can add the literature of cross-cultural experience, especially the life stories of bilingual language immigrants, cf. Besemeres (2002), Besemeres and Wierzbicka (eds in press).



#### 4. The seven deadly sins of “universalist pragmatics” (UP)

Before passing to the studies in the present volume, it is well to remind ourselves of the major trends in the “universalist pragmatics” (UP) paradigm, against which these ethnopragmatic studies can be counterposed. Perhaps the three leading trends in universalist pragmatics are: (i) Gricean and neo-Gricean pragmatics, from Grice (1975) through to Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Levinson (2000), (ii) the “politeness theory” inaugurated by Brown and Levinson (1978), and (iii) the contrastive pragmatics of Blum-Kulka and colleagues, which focuses on variable cultural realisations of speech acts (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper eds 1989; Blum-Kulka and Kasper 1993). These three trends are of course universalist in different respects and with different emphases. Neo-Gricean pragmatics assumes certain universal principles of communication, politeness theory assumes a universal model of positive and negative face needs (generating positive and negative politeness strategies), and contrastive pragmatics assumes a universal inventory of speech act types.

As mentioned in section 1, it is increasingly evident that these avowedly universalist models are Anglocentric, in the sense that they adopt some aspect of Anglo norms or practices as a baseline or template, and then attempt to generalise or adjust this to suit all other cultural settings. The criticism is most readily illustrated with Grice’s (1975) maxims such as ‘Say no more than is required’ and ‘Avoid obscurity’. As critics have often remarked, these sound more like the ideals of an Anglo-American philosopher than the outcomes of the natural logic of human communication. The situation hardly improves when reformulated in terms of “relevance”, given that the term *relevance* itself, which is supposed to sum up the overriding principle of communication, is so culture-specific that it lacks equivalents even in most European languages, let alone in most of languages of the world. Of course it is possible for a defender of relevance theory (or Grice’s maxims) to make light of the culture-specific nature of their central construct, but this merely illustrates ethnocentrism in action.

Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory betrays its Anglo origins in its profoundly “individualist” character, as pointed out by an increasing number of critics, especially from East Asia. It is also deeply flawed by terminological ethnocentrism in its primary dichotomies of “positive face” and “negative face”, and in its uncritical use of descriptors such as “direct” and “indirect” – not to mention the quintessentially Anglo term *imposition*. As for contrastive pragmatics, it is flawed by the assumption that English speech act categories

such as ‘request’, ‘apology’, and ‘compliment’ are appropriate tools for describing languages and cultures which have no such indigenous categories.

The weaknesses of universalist pragmatics can be usefully itemised in the following list – the Seven Deadly Sins of Universalist Pragmatics (UP).

1. Universalist Pragmatics (UP) grossly underestimates the cultural shaping of speech practices.
2. Being framed in terms which are alien to the speakers concerned, UP necessarily imposes an “outsider perspective”.
3. UP creates a gulf between pragmatics and the description of other cultural phenomena.
4. UP describes, but it seldom explains.
5. UP is terminologically “slippery”: different authors use its technical descriptors with different meanings.
6. UP is Anglocentric: it implicitly adopts Anglo norms and practices as baseline universals, and its English-based descriptors are replete with terminological ethnocentrism.
7. Being locked into the vocabulary of a foreign language, UP closes off the description to the people concerned.

## 5. This volume

The studies in this volume amply demonstrate that cultural scripts are able to “do the job” of ethnopragmatic description in fine detail and with great explanatory force, while avoiding terminological ethnocentrism, and in such a way as to integrate ethnopragmatic description with broader cultural themes.

Anna Wierzbicka describes cultural scripts which inhibit speakers of mainstream “Anglo English” from *putting pressure* on others, thereby motivating a range of alternative strategies and conversational moves. Cliff Goddard contextualises and explicates a characteristically Australian form of deadpan jocular irony, often misunderstood by English speakers of other cultural backgrounds. Jock Wong shows how terms of address and related speech practices of Singapore English reflect and enact a model of social hierarchy based on generational differences. These first three studies, it should be pointed out, all focus on aspects of the English language. To “de-naturalise” the pragmatics of English is one of the most urgent tasks of ethnopragmatics (cf. Wierzbicka 2006).

Zhengdao Ye focuses on facial expressions, and their corresponding lexical expressions, in Chinese. To understand the significance of these

expressions in context, she argues, one must grasp the underlying norms that encourage and prescribe certain emotional expressions in Chinese culture. Rie Hasada explores cultural attitudes towards the expression of emotions and their implications for interactional style in Japanese. Catherine Travis shows how the values of *confianza* ('trust') and *calor humano* ('human warmth') influence various discourse features of Colombian Spanish. Felix Ameka discusses the ethnopragmatics of speech formulas for "gratitude" in West African languages such as Ewe, Akan, and Buli, showing how they presuppose deeply culturally embedded values and beliefs about death and the rituals related to it.

The studies in this volume address languages and cultures from every continent. Taken together, they are an impressive demonstration of the power and subtlety of the new methods and techniques of a semantically grounded ethnopragmatics.

## Notes

1. For example, in a recent and supposedly comprehensive *Handbook of Pragmatics* (Horn and Ward eds 2004), with 32 individual chapters running to over 800 pages, the term 'culture' does not even appear in the Index.
2. A good deal of ethnopragmatics has been conducted under the banner of "cross-cultural pragmatics", including Anna Wierzbicka's (2003a) groundbreaking volume of this name. Ethnopragmatics is a more appropriate designation, however, for several reasons. First, ethnopragmatics does not necessarily adopt a contrastive or comparative approach: it can be undertaken within a single language and culture. Second, many works conducted under the general banner of cross-cultural pragmatics do not share the three-fold alignment of objectives, methods, and evidence base described here. Third, the term ethnopragmatics is more perspicacious because it highlights the key feature which differentiates it from the universalist mainstream, namely, its emphasis on culturally anchored explanations.
3. This Table is an updated version of the one presented in Goddard (2002c: 14). The newly proposed primes BE (SOMEWHERE) ('*be* of location') and BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING) ('*be* of specification') have been added, as have TOUCH ('contact') and MOMENT (cf. Goddard 2002d, in press).
4. In this volume, cultural scripts are introduced by the component 'people think like this'. Though this is simple and clear, it is not clear that the wording is fully optimal. For some purposes, one could argue that more complex versions such as 'many people think like this', or 'people know that many people

think like this’ would be more appropriate. It is also possible that different kinds of scripts might require somewhat different framing components. This issue is left open for further research.

5. Yoon (2004a) cites the following set of Korean fixed expressions, which all refer to the cultural imperative to show respect for people who are older than oneself. Notice the repeated use of ‘above’ and ‘below’: *wuy ala an kali-ko* [regardless of above and below], *wuy alay pwunpyel epsi* [without thinking of above and below], *nen wuy alay-to eps-e?* [don’t you have above or below], *wuy alay-lul molu-ta* [not knowing above or below].
6. An earlier formulation of “belief scripts” assumed that a different introductory frame was required, hinged around the semantic prime KNOW, namely, ‘everyone knows: —’. (The word ‘everyone’ can be regarded as a language-specific portmanteau for ALL and SOMEONE.) The idea was to directly portray the “taken for granted” status of the cultural belief. Despite the attractions of this idea, there were also problems: in particular, the proposed ‘everyone knows: —’ component seemed a bit too “strong”. Comments by Bert Peeters have persuaded me that the requisite effect is achieved by the simpler means described in the chapter.
7. Yoon’s (2004a) original script was introduced by an initial component ‘it is good if a person thinks about people like this’; but it seems debatable whether such a component is necessary or appropriate. It would present the content of the social model as a “recommended” way of thinking about society, rather than as a “social reality”, so to speak. The version given as script [N] is slightly condensed as compared with Yoon’s (2004a) original phrasing, but the essential content remains the same.

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