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The Double Life of a Bilingual:
A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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My "Discovery" of Australian Culture.

I live in Australia. I have lived here for more than twenty years. But I am not an Australian. I was born in Poland, and I am Polish. Australia is an open "multicultural" society, and people like me are widely accepted here as what was once termed "new Australians", while being at the same time allowed to maintain their "ethnic identity", defined in terms of their country of origin. I could say, therefore, that I am both a Pole and an Australian. To my ear, however, this would sound phoney. Although I am an Australian citizen, I don't have two nationalities, as I don't have two native languages. My native language is Polish, and so is my native culture.

At the same time, Australia is now my home, and my ties with this country are very strong. First of all, my husband is Australian (which was why I came to live here in the first place), although he learnt Polish and speaks it so well that Poles have often mistaken him for a Pole, and knows, understands, and appreciates Poland better than I would have ever thought possible for a so-called foreigner.

Second, my two daughters are Australians, although they, too, speak Polish very well, and although of them it could be truly said that they are both Australian and Polish.

Third, having lived and worked in Australia for twenty odd years, and being a member of, one might say, an Australian family, I have developed a deep professional interest in Australian culture, and have studied it over the years in a number of articles and book chapters. (See Wierzbicka 1986, 1991, 1992a, and in press a).

Fourth, although in my basic cultural identity and in my basic emotions, I have remained Polish, I have come to deeply cherish Australia: its landscape, its cultural heritage, its characteristic style of interpersonal relations, and its characteristic ways of speaking. Since it is fashionable in Australian intellectual (especially academic) circles to characterize Australian culture and history (in a thoroughly ahistorical way) as, above all else, "racist" and "sexist", I have invested a great deal of professional energy into trying to oppose this fashion and into writing, as a linguist, "in defense of Australian culture".

The "discovery" of traditional Australian culture, and the study of Australian English as an expression of this culture, became for me an exciting intellectual adventure. It taught me, for example, that words are a society's cultural artefacts, and that they serve as transmittors of social attitudes

and cultural values. I became fascinated with characteristically Australian words and concepts such as dob in (roughly, betray someone by "informing" on them), whinge (roughly, complain and whine at the same time), or shout (roughly, pay for other people, in a spirit of good-humoured generosity and good fellowship); in characteristic Australian abbreviations such as mozzies (for mosquitoes) or Aussies (for Australians); in peculiarly Australian interjections such as good-o, right-o, or good-on-ya.

I came to realize that, for example, the words dob in and dobber reflect the traditional Australian cult of loyalty and solidarity, especially solidarity vis à vis authorities, and the words whinge, whinger, and sook reflect the Australian cult of toughness and resilience; that the word larrikin (defined by the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1964)) as "the Australian equivalent of the 'Hoodlum' or 'Hooligan'"), expresses a positive evaluation of irreverent wit and defiance of social norms and conventions; that the word Aussie (noun and adjective) expresses the capacity of "traditional Australians" for combining an attachment to and pride in their country with a self-deprecating dislike of pathos, pomposity, and "big words"; and that it also reflects some important aspects of the traditional Australian self-image, with an emphasis on being brave, tough, practical, good-humoured, and cheeky.

I also came to realize that the expression good on you (which implies admiration for the addressee's attitude and not necessarily for achievement or success) reflects the value placed on attitudes rather than on success or achievement as such; that the response words goodo (good-oh) and righto (right-oh, rightio), whose very meaning signals a good-humoured willingness to cooperate on an equal footing, reflect the value placed on egalitarian relations and on a relaxed atmosphere in social interaction; that the exclamation you bloody beauty reflects among other things the Australian value of anti-sentimentality, as does the use of the word bastard when used to express positive feelings; and that Australian names such as Tez, Tezza (for Terry), Bazza (for Barry), or Shaz, Shazza (for Sharon) reflect the traditional Australian combination of values: solidarity, equality, and anti-sentimental ("rough") affection.

All these discoveries had for me a deeply personal significance. It wasn't just the Australian literary hero, Bazza Mackenzie, who was called "Bazza", it was my own daughter, Mary (for me, Marysia, Marysieńka, Marysik), who came to be referred to, and addressed (by her friends) as "Muz". Australian humour was part of our family life, and I had to learn to cope with Australian "jocular insults", the Australian practice of "chiacking" (making fun of people in a spirit of congenial fellowship and good humour), the Australian use

of sarcasm, the Australian spirit of independence and defiance ....

How did it happen, it might be asked. Well, this may not apply to everyone, but in my personal experience learning to cope was linked with a search for understanding: it was intellectually exciting to discover "on one's own skin" (a Polish idiom) the reality of different cultural norms (so often denied by monolingual and/or monocultural theoreticians), and to try to articulate these norms in clear and coherent ways.

Thus, I became engrossed in the study of Australian culture (through the study of Australian English and the Australian "ethnography of speaking"), and everyday life provided me with constant tutorials and with tests in the subject, not all of which I passed, but from which I always tried to learn.

But my life in Australia opened the door for me to other interesting intellectual discoveries as well.

My "discovery" of Polish language and culture

One of the most important of these personal discoveries which I owe to my life in Australia was the discovery of the phenomenon of Polish culture. When I lived in Poland, immersed in Polish culture, I was no more aware of its specialness than I was of the air I breathed. Now, immersed

in the very different Anglo (and Anglo-Australian) culture, I gradually became more and more aware of the distinctiveness of Polish culture.

To begin with, I became aware of Polish words which had no equivalents in English, and each of which epitomized something very special: an emotion, an attitude, a belief, a relationship, a colour, a time, a type of experience.

I noted that time was structured differently in Polish and in English. In English, the structure of the day in general seemed determined by the structure of a working day, with a lunch-break time in the middle, and two equal halves before it ("morning") and after it ("afternoon"). In Polish, on the other hand, the day was seen as a whole, extending from the end of one night and the beginning of another, with an obiad ("dinner") roughly in the middle, and with a "morning" (rano) seen as a first part of the day, extending till no later than 11am, and with an "afternoon" (popołudnie) starting after the obiad, that is, roughly after 3.30 or 4pm. (The very important Anglo concepts of "AM" and "PM" had no equivalents in Polish at all, and played no particular role in Polish culture.)

Social practices associated with the Polish-speaking and English-speaking parts of my life were also different. For example, speaking Polish in Australia I couldn't find Polish words for such common-place new realities as

"babysitters" or "parties"; whereas common Polish words such as, for example, imieniny ("nameday celebrations") disappeared from my life together with the social rituals which they stood for.

But if the outer world associated with the English language was different from my accustomed Polish world, the inner world was even more so. For example, I came to realize that the most important everyday emotions in Polish had no place in English. For instance, in Polish, I used to say often "strasznie się cieszę", "strasznie się martwię", or "okropnie się denerwuję", but none of these things were really sayable in English. First, the English equivalents of the Polish intensifiers strasznie and okropnie ('terribly') would sound excessive in an English-language conversation. Second, the Polish durative reflexive verbs suggested an on-going emotional process, and an active attitude (similar to that reflected in the atypical English verb to worry, and in the archaic verb to rejoice), and so they were quite different from the English adjectives describing states such as "happy" or "upset". And third, the lexical meaning of the Polish words in question was different from any corresponding English words: cieszę się was closer to the archaic rejoice than to happy, martwię się combined something like worry with elements of chagrin and sorrow, denerwuję się suggested a state of great agitation and "fretting" (but without the negative

connotations of the latter word) as well as something like being upset, and so on.

Similarly, everyday "Polish" emotions described in Polish by the expression zła jestem (lit. 'I am bad', 'I am mad/angry/cross/furious'), or bardzo mi przykro (lit.'to me, it is hurtful/unpleasant/painful/sorry') could simply not be expressed or described in any straightforward way in English; not to mention the key Polish emotion of tęsknota (homesickness/nostalgia/heartache-caused-by-separation).

What applied to emotions, applied also to religion, to the everyday philosophy of life, to values, to social relations, to history. For example, I noticed that English had no word corresponding to the Polish word Boży (an adjective derived from Bóg 'God', but unlike divine, very colloquial and not neutral but embodying a positive attitude of faith and devotion); and also, that the literal English equivalents of Polish exclamatory expressions such as mój Boże (my God!), o Jezu! (Jesus!, lit. oh Jesus!) or Chryste Panie! (Christ!, lit. Christ Lord!) expressed quite different emotions from those embodied in the Polish expressions: the English expressions sounded angry and disrespectful, whereas the Polish ones sounded like prayerful invocations. (See Wierzbicka, in press c).

The Polish philosophy of life seemed to be best expressed in the common Polish word los, whose primary

meaning is 'a lottery ticket', and a secondary one, 'a fate/destiny', but seen somewhat in terms of a lottery: unpredictable, uncertain, risky, and yet full of unforeseeable possibilities. (See Wierzbicka 1992a).

Some traditional Polish values, shaped by Poland's historical experience, were clearly reflected in the positive connotations of adjectives such as nieugięty ('inflexible' — in English, pejorative), szalony (lit. mad, foolhardy), or śmiały (daring).

History seemed to be everywhere: in the resonant Polish word niepodległość (national independence, distinct from simply "independence", that is, niezależność), in the word wolność (freedom, but with connotations of national freedom, that is freedom from oppressive foreign powers), in the important Polish verb wynarodowić się (lit. to lose one's allegiance to one's nation, to cease to be a member of one's own nation, with implications of shameful betrayal and irreparable loss). (See Wierzbicka in press a).

The historical frame of reference in my Polish world was defined very largely by expressions such as przed wojną ("before the war", that is, in Poland, before 1939), w czasie Powstania ("during the Uprising"), po Powstaniu ("after the Uprising"), (referring to the Warsaw uprising against the German occupying forces in 1944), w czasie okupacji ("during the occupation", referring to the German occupation

of Poland from 1939 to 1945), and so on. That was how people spoke in Poland, and how they thought about their lives. Naturally, in English people's temporal frames of reference were different.

Interpersonal relations associated with and reflected in Polish were also different from those linked with English. For example, when I tried to soothe my children in the first weeks of their lives with anxious Polish invocations of "Córeńko! Córeńko!" (lit. "little daughter! little daughter!") my husband pointed out how quaint it sounds from the point of view of a native speaker of English to solemnly address a new-born baby as "little daughter". Now, when my daughters are university students, I still say to them córeńko!, and this typical Polish invocation reflects something important about Polish family relations and traditional cultural attitudes.

Like many other newcomers to the Anglo world, I was struck by the elasticity of the English concept of 'friend', which could be applied to a wide range of relationships, from deep and close, to quite casual and superficial. This was in stark contrast to the Polish words przyjaciel (male) and przyjaciółka (female), which could only stand for exceptionally close and intimate relationships. What struck me even more was the importance of the concept embodied in the Polish word koledzy (female counterpart koleżanki) as a

basic conceptual category defining human relations — quite unlike the relatively marginal concept encoded in the English word colleague, relevant only to professional elites. It became clear to me that concepts such as 'koledzy' ('koleżanki') and 'przyjaciele' (przyjaciółki) (plural) organized the social universe quite differently from concepts such as 'friends'. (See Wierzbicka, in press a).

Polish grammar, too, emerged as a world of conceptual distinctions quite different from those suggested by English. One example of this has already been provided in the preceding discussion of social relations: Polish grammar demanded that a great deal of attention should be paid to gender distinctions. Thus, while in English one could speak about a "friend", without revealing this "friend's" gender, in Polish this was not possible: one had to always distinguish between a przyjaciel and a przyjaciółka (female), or between a kolega (male) and a koleżanka (female). Another conceptual distinction which I discovered was consistently drawn by Polish but not by English grammar was that between "normal size objects" and "small objects". Thus, one couldn't speak in Polish simply about a bottle, a box, or a bag, one always had to make a distinction between, for example, butelka ('bottle') and buteleczka ('small bottle'), pudełko ('box') and pudełeczko, or between worek ('bag') and woreczek ('small bag'). In fact, in many cases one was also forced to

distinguish "normal size objects" from "oversize objects" (e.g. butla 'big bottle', pudło 'big box', and wór 'big bag').

The constant attention to size, required by Polish grammar, was clearly related to the importance of "affectionate" diminutives in Polish discourse, whose frequent use gave Polish interpersonal interaction a quite different flavour from that characteristic of, or indeed possible in, English. For example, in English one couldn't urge one's guests to eat some more śledzika ('dear little herring') or to drink some more herbatki ('dear little tea'), for such diminutive forms of nouns were simply not available. Nor could one coax a child to do something szybciutko ('dear-little-quickly') or cichutko ('dear-little-quietly'), for English adverbs don't have diminutive norms even in baby talk. (Cf. Wierzbicka 1991).

But of course it wasn't just certain grammatical forms which were "lacking" in English (from my Polish perspective); what was different was the whole style of interpersonal interaction. To put it crudely, diminutives like "dear-little-herring" were not needed in English speech for in Anglo culture it was not seen as appropriate to urge guests to eat more than they wanted to; and a constant flood of diminutives in interaction with children was not only not needed but it would have seemed inappropriate, given the prevailing ethos of personal autonomy, independence, and

self-reliance.

When I heard people express their satisfaction that their children (in their late teens) were leaving home and going to live elsewhere, and to study in another city, I was initially shocked and astonished: the hierarchy of values reflected in such declarations was very different indeed from that to which I was accustomed in Poland. But these and other similar differences in attitudes and in the prevailing hierarchy of values seemed to be quite consistent with the differences in ways of speaking that I was constantly observing.
Thus, a whole new field of enquiry opened before me: cross-cultural pragmatics. I developed a new university course on "Cross-cultural communication", and a new theory: the theory of "cultural scripts", which aimed at providing a universal "culture notation" (cf. Hall 1976) for the description and comparison of cultures. (Cf. e.g. Wierzbicka 1994a, b, and c; 1996b).

My discovery of "cultural psychology"

In his essay "Cultural psychology — what is it?" which opens the important collective volume entitled "Cultural psychology", Richard Shweder (1990:1) writes:

> A discipline is emerging called "cultural psychology." It is not general psychology. It

> is not cross-cultural psychology. It is not psychological anthropology. It is not ethnopsychology. It is cultural psychology. And its time may have arrived, once again.
> (...)
>
> Cultural psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche, resulting less in psychic unity of humankind than in ethnic divergences in mind, self, and emotion. Cultural psychology is the study of the ways subject and object, self and other, psyche and culture, person and context, figure and ground, practitioner and practice live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up.

Since my "los" (fate/destiny/lottery of life) has led me to live a deeply bi-cultural life, "cultural psychology" as presented in the passage above was for me a matter of intimate and vital personal experience. It wasn't just in my life that the two cultures — Polish and Anglo (and, more specifically, Anglo-Australian) — met (or should I say

collided?), it was also in my "psyche", in my "self", in my "mind", my emotions, my personal relations, my daily interactions. I had to start learning new "cultural scripts" to live by, and in the process I became aware of the old "cultural scripts" which had governed my life hitherto. I also became aware, in the process, of the reality of "cultural scripts" and their importance to the way one lives one's life, to the image one projects, and even to one's personal identity.

For example, when I was talking on the phone, from Australia, to my mother in Poland (15,000 km. away), with my voice, loud and excited, carrying much further than is customary in an Anglo conversation, my husband would signal to me: "don't shout!". For a long time, this perplexed and confused me: to me, this "shouting" and this "excitement" was an inherent part of my personality. Gradually, I came to realize that this very personality was in part culturally constituted. But to what extent was it desirable, or necessary, to change it, in deference to my new cultural context?

Early in our life together, my husband objected to my too frequent — in his view — use of the expression "of course". At first, this puzzled me, but eventually it dawned on me that using of course as broadly as its Polish counterpart oczywiście is normally used would imply that the interlocutor has overlooked something obvious. In the

Polish "confrontational" style of interaction such an implication is perfectly acceptable, and it is fully consistent with the use of such conversational particles such as, for example, przecież ('but obviously — can't you see?'). In mainstream Anglo culture, however, there is much more emphasis on "tact", on avoiding direct clashes, and there are hardly any confrontational particles comparable with those mentioned above. Of course does exist, but even of course tends to be used more in agreement than in disagreement (e.g. "could you do X for me?" — "Of course"). Years later, my daughter Mary told me that the Polish conversational expression ależ oczywiście 'but-Emphatic of course' (which I would often replicate in English as "but of course") struck her as especially "foreign" from an Anglo cultural point of view; and my close friend and collaborator Cliff Goddard pointed out, tongue in cheek, that my most common way of addressing him (in English) was "But Cliff …"

Thus, I had to learn to avoid overusing not only "of course" but also many other expressions dictated by my Polish cultural scripts; and in my working life at an Anglo university this restraint proved invaluable, indeed essential.

I had to learn to "calm down", to become less "sharp" and less "blunt", less "excitable", less "extreme" in my judgements, more "tactful" in their expression. I had to learn the use of Anglo understatement (instead of more hyperbolic

and more emphatic Polish ways of speaking). I had to learn to avoid sounding "dogmatic", "argumentative", "emotional". (There were lapses, of course.) Like the Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman (1989) I had to learn the use of English expressions such as "on the one hand..., on the other hand", "well yes", "well no", or "that's true, but on the other hand".

Thus, I was learning new ways of speaking, new patterns of communication, new modes of social interaction. I was learning the Anglo rules of turn-taking ("let me finish!", "I haven't finished!"). I was learning not to use the imperative (Do X!) in my daily interaction with people and to replace it with a broad range of interrogative devices (Would you do X? Could you do X? Would you mind doing X? How about doing X? Why don't you do X? Why not do X?, and so on).

But these weren't just changes in the patterns of communication. There were also changes in my personality. I was becoming a different person, at least when I was speaking English. Students' course assessment questionnaires have often thrown light on my cultural dilemmas. Thus, while often very positive and praising my "enthusiasm", for a long time they also often included critical accents referring to my "intensity", "passion" and "lack of detachment". Clearly, in Thomas Kochman's (1981) terms, I tended to give my lectures as an "advocate", not as a

"spokesman" — or at any rate, I was too much of an "advocate", not enough of a "spokesman". I was coming from a language-and-culture system (Polish) where the very word beznamiętny (lit. 'dispassionate') has negative connotations, but I was lecturing in a language (English) where the word emotional has negative connotations, while the word dispassionate implies praise. I had to learn, then, to lecture more like a "spokesman" and less like an "advocate". I had to learn to become less "emotional" and more "dispassionate" (at least in public speaking, and in academic writing).

There were, however, limits to my malleability as a "culturally constituted self". There were English modes of interaction that I never learnt to use — because I couldn't and because I wouldn't: they went too much against the grain of that "culturally constituted self". For example, there was the "How are you" game: "How are you? — I'm fine, how are you?"; there were weather-related conversational openings ("Lovely day isn't it? — Isn't it beautiful?"). There were also "white lies", and "small talk" (the latter celebrated in a poem by the Polish poet and professor of Slavic literatures at Harvard University, Stanisław Barańczak).

The acute discomfort that such conversational routines were causing me led me to understand the value attached by Polish culture to "spontaneity", to saying what one really

thinks, to talking about what one is really interested in, to showing what one really feels. It also led me to contemplate the function of such linguistic lubricants in Anglo social interaction. Why was it that Polish has no words or expressions corresponding to "white lies" or "small talk"? Why was it that English had no words or expressions corresponding to basic Polish particles and "conversational signposts" such as przecież, ależ ('but can't you see?'), ależ skądże (lit. 'but where from?' i..e. where did you get that idea?), skądże znowu ('but where from again?), all expressions indicating vigorous disagreement, but quite acceptable in friendly interaction in Polish?

Clearly, the rules for "friendly" and socially acceptable interaction in Polish and in English were different. Consequently, I could never believe in the "universal maxims of politeness", in the universal "logic of conversation", and the "cooperative principle" promulgated by scholars such as Grice (1975), Leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1978). I knew from personal experience, and from two decades of meditating on that experience, that the Polish "maxims of politeness" and the Polish rules of "conversational logic" were different from the Anglo ones. I also knew that the differences between the Anglo "rules", "maxims" and "principles" (presented in the literature as "universal") and, for example, Polish ones, were not superficial, but reflected

differences in deep-seated, subconscious attitudes — attitudes which were fused with the core of a person's personality. Thus, I came to feel that by learning the Anglo ways I could enrich myself immeasurably, but I could also "lose myself".

To function in the Anglo society, I had to learn to be a new person; but I didn't want to "betray" the old person. So living in an Anglo society, working at an Anglo university, and yet speaking Polish domestically, travelling almost every year to Poland, reading in Polish, writing letters in Polish, thinking to a very large extent in Polish, meant constantly shifting between two personalities. I had to constantly stretch myself; but there were limits beyond which I didn't want to go. And these limits needed to be constantly explored and negotiated.

For example, I have never brought myself to use formulaic expressions such as Pleased to meet you, It was nice meeting you, or How are you?, and not just because they are formulaic (Polish, too, has formulaic expressions), but because they are not fully formulaic, and, unlike, for example, Japanese politeness formulae, "pretend" to be spontaneous and individualized. To use such expressions would have gone too much against the grain. On the other hand, I have learnt to use, and even to savour, Anglo conversational strategies such as "I agree, but on the other hand..." (instead

of simply saying "No!")

I felt, then, that "cultural psychology" was definitely a field for me. It resonated with my experience, and it seemed to be dealing with something very real, very important, and endlessly fascinating. I could not, however, see "cultural psychology" as an alternative to a search for the "psychic unity of humankind". The "psychic unity", too, seemed to me real, important, and fascinating. It, too, resonated with my experience. I didn't want to choose between the two. I wanted to pursue both.

My pursuit of universals

Although my university studies and early academic career were focussed on Polish language and literature, several years before moving to Australia my attention had shifted to universals. One could say that this shift was due to chance (although personally I always felt it was a kind of a miracle rather than just chance). I had already completed, and published, my PhD dissertation (on Polish Renaissance prose), and was looking for direction in my further life and work, when a linguist at Warsaw University, Andrzej Bogusławski, gave a lecture in 1965 which precipitated me towards a pursuit of universal conceptual primitives, in the spirit of Leibniz's search for "the alphabet of human thoughts".

Leibniz's "alphabet of human thoughts" (1903/[1704]:435) could be dismissed as utopian because he never proposed anything as concrete as a list of hypothetical primitives (although in his unpublished work he left several partial drafts). As one modern commentator wrote, "The approach would be more convincing if one could at least gain some clue as to what the table of fundamental concepts might look like" (Martin 1964:25). Bogusławski suggested that the best clues as to what the table of fundamental concepts might look like can come from the study of languages and that for this reason modern linguistics has a chance of succeeding where philosophical speculation had failed. The "golden dream" of the seventeenth-century thinkers, which couldn't be realized within the framework of philosophy and which was therefore generally abandoned as utopian, could now be realized, Bogusławski maintained, if it were approached from a linguistic and empirical rather than from a purely philosophical point of view.

I was immensely impressed by the program that Bogusławski set for linguistics, and I decided to devote myself to its pursuit — a decision which was strengthened by a year spent in America at MIT, a stronghold of non-semantic generative grammar, which by comparison seemed to me sterile and uninspiring. Thus I embarked on a pursuit of universals, which soon resulted (while I was still living in

Poland) in the publication of my "Semantic explorations" (1969) and "Semantic Primitives" (1972).

Meanwhile, my husband's stay in Poland came to an end, and, as we had previously agreed, though in my case with considerable misgivings, we set out for Australia. I resigned from my position in the Polish Academy of Sciences and prepared, psychologically, for a period of great difficulties in pursuing my goal: a linguistically-based search for universals of human cognition. Unexpectedly, Canberra, which had seemed the end of the world, proved to be a paradise for research in universals. I landed in a thriving academic milieu, engaged in the study of a wide range of languages: the languages of Australia, New Guinea, numerous Pacific Islands, South-East Asia…. I found students and colleagues deeply familiar with a wide range of languages who were willing to join me in my search for universals and in the process of testing, revising and validating hypotheses about the range of possible diversity and the reality of universals. This resulted, in particular, in a collective volume where substantive hypotheses about conceptual universals were tested in a systematic way across a wide range of languages from different families and different continents (see Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1994); and a second collective volume, focussed on universal syntactic patterns, is under way (see Goddard and

Wierzbicka, Eds., Forthcoming).

Universals — genuine or spurious?

With my imagination fired by the Leibnizian "golden dream", I was eager to pursue the search for the "psychic unity of humankind"; but I wanted to discover its contours on an empirical basis (with the help of students and colleagues). At the same time, my own cross-cultural life had made me deeply suspicious of many alleged universals proclaimed in the literature.

For example, when I came to read about the alleged "basic colour terms" and "universals of colour", I was sceptical: I knew that the Polish word niebieski (from niebo 'sky') didn't mean the same, and didn't even have the same focus, as the English word blue, and that, for example, "blue jeans" could not be described in Polish as niebieskie (Plural). I also knew that the Polish word granatowy ("navy-blue") did not designate in Polish "a kind of blue" but was seen as a different kind of colour (as different as grey or green).

When the theory of speech acts came into vogue, and when I read that different kinds of speech acts such as "warning", "request" or "promise" were to be seen as "natural conceptual kinds" (cf. Searle 1979:ix), rather than as artifacts of the English language, I knew that this could not be right either, for I was aware of the language-specific

character of such putative "philosophical categories". I knew, for example, that characteristic Polish speech act verbs like częstować (roughly speaking, verbally press food upon guests), namawiać (roughly, a combination of urge and persuade), or przyrzekać (roughly speaking, an act half-way between promise and oath) had no exact equivalents in English, just as English speech act verbs like suggest, offer, or hint had no exact equivalents in Polish. It seemed clear to me that had the philosophers of speech acts such as Searle been native speakers of Polish rather than English, the philosophical charts of "different speech acts" proposed by them would have looked decidedly different (despite the authors' claims that they were interested not in English speech act verbs but in "natural kinds of illocutionary acts").

The same applied to emotions. In particular, the theory of "basic human emotions", advanced by Paul Ekman and others and widely accepted as a "scientific truth", was at variance with my own cross-cultural experience. I knew that emotion concepts linked with English words such as happy, angry, or disgusted were different from emotion concepts encoded in the Polish lexicon. For example (as mentioned earlier), the Polish reflexive verb cieszyć się was closer in meaning to the archaic English verb rejoice than to the adjective happy; and the noun złość(from zły 'bad') described an emotion which could be seen, from a Polish cultural point

of view, as more basic than anger. Given that English emotion terms did not correspond in meaning to Polish ones, why should the concepts embodied in these terms identify emotions more "basic" than those singled out by the Polish terms? The theory of "basic human emotions" identified through English emotion terms gave the emotions singled out by the English lexicon a privileged position over those encoded in any other language; and the ethnocentrism of such a standpoint seemed to me quite astonishing, as did the attempts to play down the significance of such lexical differences between languages and to hold on, coûte que coûte, to the English terms, and the Anglo emotions.

I did not doubt that there could be some "universal human emotions" or that different cultures could have independently developed some universal conceptual categories to interpret human emotional experience. But it seemed clear to me that to search for genuine universals of human experience, and human conceptualization of experience, it was necessary first to debunk the false universals, which had arisen from the unwitting absolutisation of the conceptual distinctions embodied in the English language, and which were held on to with great tenacity by scholars unwilling to acknowledge the relevance of languages to any search for human universals. (Cf. Wierzbicka, 1992b; in press b).

Conclusion

Academic life in a cross-cultural setting is a blessing, for it provides both fascinating questions and ample opportunities for trying to search for answers, and for sharing this search with others. The questions it poses are not "academic", but very closely linked with the dilemmas and the challenges of daily life, of daily encounters with other people and daily encounters with myself. For example, in what language should I write my lecture notes today? My shopping list? The entries in my desk calender? In what language should I pray? Write notes to my daughters? Speak to my husband in the presence of other people? Speak to my Polish friends in mixed company? And should I try to change the parameters of my non-verbal behaviour, depending on which language I use? Or regulate the loudness of my voice, the animation of my face, the degree of emotional "demonstrativeness", the "directness" of my requests, my invitations, my disagreements?

Just as two mirrors provide endless opportunities for reflections so too do two languages and two cultures refracted in one psyche, in which the daily confrontation of cultures can be turned into the subject of theoretical reflection, discussion, and investigation.

I try to respond to these challenges by investigating and

writing about topics such as emotions (diversity and universals), cultural "key words" (and how they can be explained to cultural outsiders), culture-specific "cultural scripts" (and their recurring, universal components), semantic universals (and their occurrence in culture-specific configurations), and so on — different themes but always the same double focus: cultural diversity and conceptual universals. (See e.g., Wierzbicka 1972, 1991, 1992a and b, 1996a, in press a and b).

In this fashion, I and my cross-cultural life constantly question, challenge, define and redefine each other.

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