

Joseph Shaules

Language, Culture, and the Embodied Mind

A Developmental Model
of Linguaculture Learning

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Joseph Shaules
Japan Intercultural Institute
Tokyo, Japan

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Chapter 1

Introduction



In some places, the ability to speak multiple languages is common and everyday. In Nairobi you'll find Kenyans who speak Kiswahili, English, and Kikuyu; In the Netherlands, it seems everyone speaks English in addition to Dutch; In India, millions switch seamlessly between English, Hindi, Bengali, and more. In other places, however, learning a foreign language seems a monumental struggle. In the United States, a miserable 1% of Americans master a foreign language they studied in school. In Japan, despite enormous resources invested in English language education, 90% of adults report having little confidence in using English. In addition, individual learning outcomes vary widely. On the one hand, motivated learners often make progress in less-than-ideal circumstances, while some who have optimal learning conditions make limited progress, e.g., long-term expatriates who fail to master the local language. Under some conditions, it seems, multilingualism is as natural as the air we breathe, while in other situations learners struggle or give up.

These contrasts highlight the deeply embodied and highly cultural nature of language. The languages that surround us when we grow up become a natural part of who we are. Language reflects the social worlds we inhabit and the values and thinking of its speakers. Learning a language provides entry into a community; it allows us to relate to others—comment on the weather, flirt, ask for a raise, and buy groceries. Language is also deeply personal. We use it to express our unique qualities and particular point of view—to stand out or blend in as we wish. Language reflects fundamental elements of our humanity. It is shared with the collective, even as we use it to express that which makes us special.

Given that language is so fundamental to community and self, it should be no surprise that learning a new language is a challenge. When we study a new language, we do much more than acquire knowledge. We must set aside our normal way of being ourselves. We must step out of our comfort zone, both individually and culturally. When we use a foreign language in unfamiliar settings, we are at a psychological and social disadvantage. If our ability is rudimentary, we face a degree of helplessness akin to infancy. To make progress, however, we must subject ourselves to such indignities. No wonder some decide that it's not worth the trouble, lose interest, or resist studying. When all goes well, however, language learning can enrich our lives.

What starts out feeling constraining ends up being liberating or transformative. We've changed—we've *become* the speaker of a new language; we form new connections, engage with new communities, and express new elements of self.

Intercultural experiences can be transformative in a similar way. When we walk the streets of a foreign land, or find ourselves in foreign situations, we are also leaving our comfort zone. Our habitual patterns of acting, thinking, or perceiving must be adjusted. This may be relatively straightforward, as when we learn the bus system in a foreign city, or practice eating with chopsticks. This adjustment process can, however, be personally demanding. We may need to get used to greeting with a kiss instead of a hug. We may be frustrated with how we are treated, or find local behavior too loud, too quiet, inefficient, or inscrutable. With patience and practice, however, we learn new cultural codes, learn to interpret behavior differently, and learn to relate in new ways. We may even learn to switch back and forth between different cultural points of view, or experience the world as a multicultural person. As with foreign language learning, cultural learning allows us to gain access to new realms of experience and self.

An integrated approach to pedagogy This book focuses on these deeper processes of language and culture learning, and argues for an integrated approach to language and culture pedagogy. As we will see, language learning and culture learning are often talked about in very different ways—language learning is often seen as the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Cultural learning is often discussed in more idealistic, abstract ways—as awareness or critical understanding. This book will argue, however, that from the perspective of embodied cognition and the unconscious mind, language and culture learning are similar processes. This book's main message is that learning to communicate in a new language requires embodying a complex set of foreign socio-cognitive patterns. It is an adaptive process—we are responding to the demand for change that language learning requires. Put simply, both language and culture learning require change at deep levels of mind and self.

This work formalizes these assertions in a learning model—the Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning (DMLL). The DMLL describes language and culture learning within a single conceptual framework, in order to encourage more integrated approaches to language and culture pedagogy. Grounded in a socio-cognitive perspective, it argues against seeing language learning primarily in terms of information processing or repetitive skill practice. It argues, instead, for a *deep learning* approach to both language and culture pedagogy—a transformational process of development and change. It doesn't simply advocate for adding cultural learning goals into foreign language pedagogy. Instead, it argues that language and culture are intertwined at such deep levels of the mind and self, that both can be understood in similar terms. This idea is reflected in the word *linguaculture*, which emphasizes the idea that language and culture are two parts of a larger whole. And while the DMLL draws on ideas from brain and mind sciences, such as embodied cognition, complexity, and dynamic skill theory, its goal is not a technical description of learning processes. Rather, it hopes to inform the way we think about language, culture, and learning—and thus the mental models we rely on when we plan our lessons.

The need for learning models Learning models are essential and unavoidable for educators. It is impossible to put together a lesson, write a textbook, or design a curriculum without some way of thinking about how people learn, desired outcomes, and how to reach those goals. Any sort of teaching is necessarily grounded in assumptions about learning held by the educator. As Larsen-Freeman (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008) points out, when we don't have formal models to rely on, our thinking is often guided by metaphorical understanding:

Metaphors are not just literary tools for ornamenting language; they are indispensable to the human mind. Whenever we have to contemplate the abstract, voice the difficult or make sense of the complicated, we turn to metaphor. Metaphor enables us to 'see' or understand one thing in terms of another, through analogies or mappings between two conceptual domains. (p. 11)

Metaphors and formal models both shape and reflect the way we think about learning. We may think of learning in terms of adding to our students' store of knowledge (a banking or storehouse metaphor) or think of memory as a muscle that must be exercised. A learning model takes this mental imagery a step further. As Larsen-Freeman puts it: "when a metaphorical idea is developed into a collection of linked metaphors that are used to talk and think about some aspect of the world, it starts to function as a model or theory" (p. 12.). Such a model provides a formal description of how something works, such that we can better achieve the outcomes we desire.

Good models help us clarify our thinking and lend themselves to practical application—as Lewin (1951) famously said, "there is nothing more practical than a good theory." The term *theory* is typically associated with attempts to explain a phenomenon, while models provide a simplified representation of that phenomenon with a particular purpose in mind. Models tend to be simpler than theories, although there can be great theoretical sophistication incorporated into a model. Ideally, models should be intuitively easy to grasp yet provide insight into complexity. They should reflect salient aspects of an externally verifiable reality and provide guidance for accomplishing the objectives relative to that model.

Yet models necessarily represent a simplification—a way of making sense of something that is inherently complex. Different models may be useful for different purposes because they highlight different elements of a phenomenon. By way of analogy, a topographical map—one that shows the elevation of natural features—will look very different from a tourist map that shows popular landmarks and transportation networks. These maps will look very different, but neither is wrong. Models outline processes and act as navigational guides, and shouldn't be mistaken for a full theoretical description of the phenomena they are representing.

In the field of language education, models can be distinguished from methods, which generally refers to a set of techniques unified by a particular way of understanding learning (Krashen 1982; Stevick 1976, 1980). *The Silent Way*, for example, is a teaching method developed by Gattegno (1963) that emphasized silence to focus learner attention. Models and methods can also be distinguished from an *approach*, which refers more broadly to a set of principles or assumptions about learning. Different approaches may focus on different elements of a phenomenon, such as when

we speak of a *cognitive approach* to understanding second language acquisition, as opposed to a *sociocultural approach* (Ellis 2008). Approaches can also be developed for particular pedagogical purposes. For example, different authors have articulated the principles of an intercultural approach to language teaching (Byram et al. 2002, 2017; Corbett 2003; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013). This work incorporates a socio-cognitive approach—its theoretical assumptions are grounded in the empirical study of cognitive processes. This work also represents a humanistic approach—it sees language and culture learning in psychological terms, as personally meaningful, with potential for human growth and development.

Assumptions about learning are more than theoretical abstractions. They shape our thinking about pedagogy. For example, if we think of learning in terms of information processing, we are more likely to feel our students need correct input to make progress; if we think of memory like a muscle, we may focus on strengthening it through repetition. If, on the other hand, we think of learning as an embodied phenomenon, we are more likely to emphasize experiential learning that is meaningful and contextualized. This work seeks to spark discussion about approaches to language and cultural learning. It argues against the notion that language learning is fundamentally a psychological neutral, primarily intellectual pursuit. It sees both language learning and cultural learning in terms of development and growth. Language and culture learning change us, and help change the world by building bridges of intercultural understanding.

A transformative perspective This book has been informed by the author's experience growing up in the United States, where bilingualism is common but language learning is rare. I nearly failed Spanish classes in high school, only to have my interest piqued by foreign tourists at my part-time job. It has been informed by 3 years in Mexico, 2 years in France, and many years living and working in Japan. There, English is considered the entry point for intercultural living and enormous resources are invested in language education—often with frustrating results. I have witnessed the struggles of learners who believe that English is important, yet feel little progress after years of study. I have researched the cultural adjustment of long-term expatriates, some of whom speak the local language poorly. I teach foreign students living in Japan, and Japanese students heading abroad. I spent 2 years in France, where I re-experienced culture shock and struggled with French pronunciation. I have studied the intercultural effects of globalization in Bali, while taking virtual classes in Indonesian with teachers in Yogyakarta, Java.

Over the years, I have been struck by how we take language and culture for granted, and how difficult, yet enriching, language learning and intercultural experiences can be. I see that we often want to learn a foreign language, even as we feel lazy about doing so. I see that globalization does not always lead to intercultural understanding—indeed it can lead to intolerance. I see that translation apps are not a substitute for language learning, and that cultural difference will not go away because of technology. I have come to believe that our linguistic and cultural habits of mind affect us more than we realize, and that learning a foreign language—together with the intercultural experiences that go along with that—have the potential to be truly

transformative. Language and cultural learning have been deeply meaningful for me, and I hope this work helps others see it that way as well.

How this book is organized This book was written with three types of readers in mind: (1) language teachers interested in cultural learning; (2) intercultural educators, for example, those preparing students for a stay abroad or teaching a course in intercultural communication; (3) scholars interested in learning theory as it relates to language and culture pedagogy. It is organized so that different readers can find what is useful for them. It is separated into three parts: (1) Background, (2) Theory, and (3) Practice. Each chapter in Part I reflects on a major theme related to language, culture, and learning, including *globalization and deep culture* (Chap. 3), the *intuitive mind* (Chap. 4), *deep learning* (Chap. 5), and the *psychology of linguaculture learning* (Chap. 6). Part II describes the Developmental Model of Language Learning in more theoretical detail. Chapter 7 discusses how the DMLL fits into existing language and culture scholarship. Chapters 8 and 9 explore the relationship between language and culture. Chapter 10 describes the theoretical assumptions of the DMLL, and Chap. 11 describes its four levels of learning in more detail. Part III provides examples of how the DMLL has been put into practice. Chapter 12 answers some FAQs for educators. Chapter 13 focuses on how the DMLL can inform foreign language pedagogy, while Chap. 14 focuses on culture learning pedagogy. This is followed by a brief concluding chapter and suggested readings. To allow readers to skip around, each chapter (and each section) has been written to largely stand-alone, including some restating of key ideas. Readers are encouraged to focus on elements of particular interest to them.

Simple but deep The model presented in this book is intended to be simple but deep. That is to say, its core ideas and developmental levels are easy to grasp intuitively—comprehensible even to beginning learners. At the same time, language, culture, and learning are dynamic and complex. Deeper understanding requires a willingness to take on some theoretical complexity. Ultimately, however, outstanding teachers are not those who have studied the most theory—they are those who, through experience and experimentation, have developed a “feel” for how learning happens, how to structure learning activities, and how to bring their unique passion and creativity into their work. The best educators make their work look simple—precisely because of their deep understanding.

You can’t get this sort of mastery from a book. It is hoped, however, that the ideas in this book will serve as a point of departure for reflection and experimentation—not simply as an intellectual exercise or set of theoretical arguments. If this work provides food for thought to practicing teachers—something that allows them to look at their work in new ways—it will have achieved its goals.

Part I
Background: Deep Learning, Language
and Culture

Chapter 2

Deep Language and Culture Learning



Abstract This chapter gives an overview of the themes of this book. It points out that despite obvious connections, language and culture are often considered separate domains of learning—*acquisition* of linguistic knowledge and skills versus development of *awareness* or higher ordered perception or cognition. This split makes it difficult to consider both within a single pedagogical framework. This work hopes to help reconcile this dilemma. It argues that language learning itself should be seen as an intercultural endeavor, similar to adjusting to a foreign environment. It introduces a *deep learning* approach to understanding this process. Deep learning refers to the process of embodying complex domains of socio-cognitive knowledge, and distinguishes between surface (conceptual and explicit) knowledge, and deep (intuitive and implicit) knowledge. While language and culture are largely separate at the level of surface knowledge, they are argued to be interrelated domains at the level of deep knowledge. The deep learning perspective allows us to see language and culture learning as fundamentally similar processes. This chapter also includes a brief introduction to the Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning (DMLL), the core offering of this book.

2.1 Odd Contradictions

There is an odd contradiction at the heart of language and culture learning. On the one hand, there's a clear, commonsense link between language and culture. Language and culture are, so to speak, two sides of a single coin—language reflects the thinking, values, and worldview of its speakers. Thus, mastering a foreign language requires navigating unfamiliar cultural terrain. Using a foreign language requires new ways of ordering our thoughts and interacting with others. A German learning Chinese, for example, must learn about and try to understand the perspective of Chinese speakers. Learning a foreign language can lead to meaningful intercultural experiences, e.g., travel, foreign friends, life abroad. Even learning a highly internationalized language, such as English—which is not associated with a single country or precise “target” culture—involves interacting with new people in foreign settings. It requires the

development of novel communicative habits—learning to think, act, and relate in new ways. In many ways, language learning is indeed an intercultural experience.

Despite these obvious connections, there is a persistent split between language and culture—both in academia and the classroom. The scholarly study of language (linguistics) is largely separate from the study of culture (anthropology). Professional associations that deal with language learning often have little to say about culture, and vice versa. This split is also found in pedagogy. While cultural understanding is clearly important when communicating in a foreign language, many language classes focus almost exclusively on linguistic forms and information exchange. Reflecting this, we often talk about *language learning* but seldom refer to *culture learning*. This is true even among specialists, as the former is studied under the rubric of *second-language acquisition*, while there is no equivalent term such as *second culture acquisition*.

This split is even more odd when we consider that cultural learning—defined as *having foreign experiences and gaining cultural insights from them*—is one of the most exciting things about language learning. The study of language forms in isolation is tedious—few learners enjoy memorizing vocabulary or studying grammar. Language learning is most engaging when it's contextualized and alive—when we communicate about things that are important to us, with real people, and in foreign situations. Learners who get “hooked” on learning a foreign language often do so because of an interest in foreign things, or because of foreign experiences. Sometimes, the smallest foreign-culture spark—foreign music, movies, manga, a trip abroad—lights the fire of language learning and supplies motivational fuel. Indeed, it's unusual to meet someone who has mastered a foreign language *without* some interest in foreign experiences.

Among educators, the conceptual split between language and culture is reflected in dichotomous thinking about teaching and learning. Foreign language pedagogy is often conceptualized in terms of gaining knowledge and practicing skills, which helps learners bridge an “information gap” (Corbett 2003). Cultural learning goals, on the other hand, are often conceptualized in more abstract, idealized terms, such as *awareness* (Gaston 1984; Tomalin and Stempleski 1993), *intercultural communicative competence* (Alptekin 2002; Byram 1997), or *criticality* (Diaz 2013). These contrasting notions create competing mental frameworks for teachers: (1) language learning conceived of as a process of *acquisition*—gaining knowledge and skills, and (2) cultural learning, thought of in terms of *awareness*, or some abstract, higher order ability or form of perceiving. This can lead to the sense that language learning and cultural learning are fundamentally separate processes—gaining concrete knowledge and skills versus developing abstract higher level abilities. Thus, even if we see connections between language and culture, we may feel the need to choose between them in the classroom. Should I spend today's lesson doing concrete language practice? Or should I set that aside and focus on abstract issues of culture? The odd contradictions of language and culture leave us stuck on the horns of a pedagogical dilemma.

2.2 Toward a More Integrated View

This book seeks to help reconcile this dilemma. It is aimed at language educators who bring an intercultural perspective to their work, and who seek a deeper, more meaningful connection between language and culture learning pedagogy. More broadly, it is intended for educators who seek to make language and/or culture learning more deeply meaningful. Many teachers see that intercultural understanding is a necessary ingredient for using a foreign language successfully, and they want language learning to lead to intercultural insights. Many seek to do more than explain vocabulary or drill students in linguistic patterns; they want to inspire as well as instruct. They understand that language and culture learning can open doors to new experiences; new relationships; new perspectives; and new forms of self-expression.

Passionate teachers find many ways to inspire their students and encourage these deeper outcomes. Yet the language–culture dichotomy creates a conundrum—it makes it harder to translate the dual passions of language and culture into a unified approach to classroom practice. It leaves fundamental questions unanswered: How does culture learning relate to language learning—is it a higher order skill needed by advanced students? What should cultural (or intercultural) learning objectives be? How can they be developed over time? Are there levels of intercultural understanding? How do they fit into language skill practice? Is specialized knowledge necessary to bring culture into the classroom? How can a more integrated view of language and culture be put into practice pedagogically? The odd contradiction of language and culture learning—they are closely related but treated separately—makes finding answers to such questions a challenge.

This work explores these issues and offers an approach to integrating language and culture pedagogy. It asks simple-sounding but complex questions: (1) What is the relationship between language and culture? (2) How does learning a language relate to the process of gaining intercultural understanding? (3) How can cultural learning be better integrated into foreign language pedagogy? A starting premise of this book is that while such fundamental questions do not have simple answers, educators should reflect on them because they are so foundational to the work that we do. In looking for answers, this work will argue that language learning is not simply an additive process of gaining knowledge and skills. Rather, it is adaptive—that is to say, it requires a deep restructuring of socio-cognitive processes. Thus, the mental and psychological challenges of learning a new language parallel the challenges we face when adapting to a foreign environment. Language learning itself is a form of cultural learning, and should be understood as such.

2.3 A Deep Learning Perspective

This work emphasizes *deep learning*. As discussed in more detail in Chap. 5, traditional forms of pedagogy emphasize teacher explanation, information recall, and conceptual understanding. The notion of deep learning, on the other hand, emphasizes

engaging learners at multiple levels of the self. Deep learning is personally meaningful and involves an active process of experimentation and experiential learning. Deep learning is transformational—it changes the way we experience things and look at the world. For language and culture learners, this means that new linguistic and cultural patterns are integrated at deep levels of the self—a new language becomes part of who we are, and a way to express our unique qualities. Cultural learning provides new ways to understand people and situations; learners have a sense of entering into new cultural worlds. Deep learning has a bigger impact on students, and on the world as well.

This work not only describes deep learning as an educational ideal, but also draws on brain and mind sciences to understand the socio-cognitive processes involved. As used here, the notion of deep learning is grounded in our increasing understanding of unconscious forms of cognition—or the *intuitive* mind—as contrasted with more conscious, analytic forms of cognition. Drawing on these insights, this work defines deep learning as the *process of embodying complex knowledge and skills into our intuitive mind*—the mental “autopilot” that we rely on to navigate everyday life. Such learning is “deep” in the neurocognitive sense, in that it results in deep forms of knowing—*mastery* of complex skills, *insight* into linguistic and cultural patterns, and *intuitive understanding*—a feel for how to use a language and how to make sense of other cultural worldviews. This work describes this process in the form of a developmental model, which both students and teachers can use to guide learning. This book is, in effect, a description of the deep learning process as it relates to language and culture.

A deep learning approach helps us conceive of language and cultural learning in a more integrated way. It makes a distinction between surface (conceptual) knowledge, and deep (intuitive) forms of knowing. At the surface level of intellectual understanding, language and culture inhabit separate domains, yet at deeper levels of cognition and self, language and culture are closely related. This integrated view represents a subtle, yet important shift in how we approach language and culture pedagogy. Rather than saying we should *add* culture to language pedagogy, it encourages educators to see both language and culture pedagogy in terms of *deep learning*. Thus, rather than asking how we can add culture into language education, we should be asking how we can make pedagogy deeper.

2.4 A Starting Metaphor

An integrated view of language and culture learning requires an important, mental adjustment. In order to go beyond seeing language learning and cultural learning as separate processes, we must develop a metaphorical understanding—a mental picture—that allows us to see both as part of a larger whole. This work does this by looking at language and culture learning as an *adaptive process—learning and change that emerges as the result of the adaptive demands of a foreign experience or environment* (Fig. 2.1). In this view, language and culture learning involve the

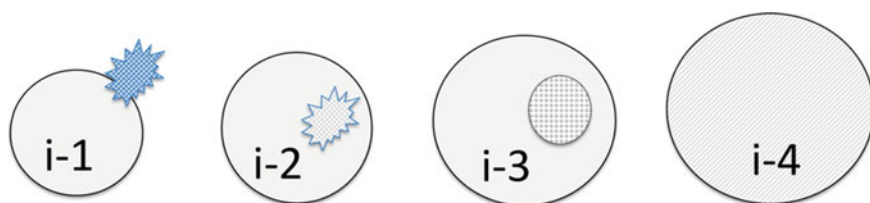


Fig. 2.1 The embodied transformation of language and culture learning

embodiment of new systems of meaning—a process that entails inner change, psychological adjustment, and some form of inner transformation. This adaptive process is grounded in the biological imperative of all living things to protect themselves from damaging elements and seek out nourishment. That’s why this diagram of language and culture learning looks so much like phagocytosis, the process by which a cell engulfs or “eats” foreign matter into itself. Once this foreignness has been embodied and integrated, the cell is enriched and transformed.

This work proposes that language and culture learning both involve adaptive processes—they modify the internal structures that we use to interact with the world. This requires internalizing a complex domain of knowledge such that it is experienced as an extension of the self. New linguistic and cultural knowledge becomes a part of our perceptual and communicative architecture and a medium for self-expression. Show Fig. 2.1 to learners, and they easily understand that it represents the attempt to integrate a new language into the self. At first, new linguistic and cultural patterns are experienced subjectively as alien or foreign—a new language sounds “funny” and people from foreign places are “different”. As we learn more, however, these patterns become more integrated into our way of thinking, acting, and communicating—into the psychological territory of the self.

Predictive processing The idea that we learn through a process of adapting to the world around us is not only a metaphor. It also fits our current understanding of human perceptual processes. While we might think that our senses simply report information about the world—as though our eyes were cameras and ears are microphones—research in psychophysiology reveals this impression to be misleading. In fact, the cognitive structures of perception are organized in terms of *predictive processing* (Friston 2011). To understand the world around it, our brain acts as an inference machine—a “predictive organ that actively generates predictions of its sensory inputs using an internal or generative model” (p. 248). We can notice this in everyday life when we pick up something that we expect to be heavy, only to be surprised by how light it feels. Predictive processing allows for efficient use of scarce cognitive resources. Our brain doesn’t need to perceive and interpret everything going on around us. Rather, it only needs to identify anomalies based on the patterns of previous experience.

Predictive processing relates not just to physical perception, but also to our interpretations of the world and what things mean. It allows us to fill in the gaps of spoken speech, and “read between the lines” when interpreting behavior. Navigating

social interaction draws on “our beliefs about the intentions of others” based on an “internal model of self in relation to others” (p. 248). We rely on an intuitive sense for what things mean, and how the world works, and what to expect from others. The predictive nature of cognition renders us highly sensitive to novelty in foreign settings—we notice details which contrast with what we are used to back home, and are puzzled or bothered when people behave in unexpected ways. In this way, experiencing foreign patterns in our environment—whether linguistic or cultural—triggers an ongoing process of learning and adaptation, as we attempt to integrate new information into our understanding of the world. Predictive processing is a central organizational feature of our cognitive systems, and as such drives both language and cultural learning.

2.5 A Neurocognitive Perspective

This work draws on a number of insights from brain and mind sciences, in addition to the idea of predictive processing. Recent years have seen an extraordinary expansion of knowledge about the brain and its mental processes—(Hassin et al. 2007). This is shedding light on areas of knowledge of interest to educators. For example, we now better understand that the cognitive processes involved with language and culture do not exist in some purely mental realm; they are integral to the whole organism, and are thus felt at deep levels of the self (Shapiro 2014). Language use is not simply a form of information processing—it is *embodied*; it is highly integrated with our feelings, our life experiences, our cultural background, and our sense of self (Vega 2015). Similarly, cultural knowledge is integral to the very fabric of our perceptual processes, and influences cognitive styles, emotion, and identity (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shaules 2014). Furthermore, linguistic meaning is not simply the manipulation of symbols, it involves *embodied simulation*—a re-creation of the experience associated with words (Bergen 2012). Put simply, linguistic meaning is not only embodied, it is grounded in the shared experience of a linguaculture community, and thus is cultural by its very nature.

This work also draws on brain and mind sciences by focusing on the idea of the *intuitive mind*—the largely unconscious forms of cognition that we rely on to navigate the routines of our everyday life. This work will argue that deep learning involves a restructuring of this cognitive autopilot. This provides new ways to look at *intercultural understanding*. This work will argue that the most important elements of cultural understanding are not related to higher forms of abstract cognition such as critical thinking or reflective awareness. Rather, intercultural insight and understanding is primarily an intuitive process of pattern recognition—the ability to understand social expectations and correctly interpret behavior. It is experienced as a sense for what things mean, a gut reaction to those meanings, and the subjective feeling that we can enter into other cultural worlds.

Deep cultural learning can lead to the intuitive ability to shift perceptual frames of reference—shall I look at this situation from the Egyptian or Senagalese point of

view? This ability does not, however, depend on conceptual understanding. Instead, it develops over time through a process of cognitive mapping and trial and error. This explains why experienced interculturalists who have never studied cultural concepts often still exhibit highly developed intercultural abilities—even if they can't explain them. Conversely, teaching abstract concepts about culture doesn't necessarily lead to intercultural insight. Cultural learning is, at its core, an experiential process that leads to intuitive insight, independent of conceptual understanding. In this way, looking at cultural learning in terms of socio-cognitive processes provides a way to go beyond the idea that cultural learning is a high-level cognitive process that is separate from language learning.

Hard science and a soft heart Speaking in terms of the brain or cognitive processes may sound reductionist—something that turns learning into a technical description of neural networks or synaptic relays. In fact, the opposite is true. A neurocognitive perspective highlights the integrated nature of thought and feeling; body and mind; nature and nurture. It helps us understand the dynamic complexity of language and culture. It also helps us see the learner in more dynamic, complex, and holistic terms. Far from turning learning into a technical pursuit, it requires a view of the learner that is humanistic. It takes us beyond the information-processing view of language learning—the idea that we simply need to master a new symbolic code. It moves us away from abstract idealizations about intercultural awareness. It sees learning in experiential terms, and as something that touches at deep levels of the self. It includes respect for the hard sciences but it is also suited to those who tend toward a soft heart—a focus on personal growth and the learner as a whole person.

2.6 Pedagogical Implications

This work will argue that seeing language and culture learning as an adaptive process has important pedagogical implications. It allows us to go beyond the view of culture as an element that should be added to language classes. Instead, this work proposes that language and culture learning happen in fundamentally similar ways. Indeed, from the perspective of adaptive processes, language learning itself can be seen as a form of cultural learning.

This may seem counterintuitive. Language learning is often considered a unique, singular process—the acquisition of a symbolic code or the mastery of an information system. This view is misleading. From the perspective of embodied cognition, both language and culture learning involve an inner adjustment in response to adaptive demands. A sojourner walking the streets of a new country, for example, must take in and learn from the foreign cultural patterns they encounter in order to better get along in their new environment. Learning is sparked by cultural difference—the gap between one's mental habits and the patterns in one's environment. As we become accustomed to these new patterns, we gain an intuitive understanding of