

## **An Overview**

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In London last February (1997) at a gathering of professional chefs, one Englishman described his experiences of working with a Japanese trainee while at a leading restaurant in Paris. The Japanese was already experienced in the Japanese classical “kaiseki” cuisine and obviously had brought his learning style to the new cultural situation. Two points impressed the Englishman. The trainee apparently took every opportunity to observe the culinary techniques of the others, focusing on the section for a while which he would subsequently be working in. His intense silent observation was in marked contrast to the other trainees. Secondly, in the midst of the generally chaotic bustle of a kitchen at work, the Japanese always arrived at his assigned work station with all his equipment neatly arranged and the necessary ingredients prepared. He then proceeded to rapidly produce his dishes with a quiet minimal effort and in a rapidity of discipline movement.

For the Englishman telling the story this was a striking encounter with a very different learning style and its product, a working style. Observing master chefs and the development of polished techniques resulted from a different learning culture. “Kaiseki” is the haute cuisine associated with the Japanese tea

ceremony, and embodies the values of traditional apprenticeship learning styles where the young trainees go through clearly defined stages of learning in which observation and practice to perfect their techniques through repetition under stern tutelage are mandatory. While disciplined training and observing play a part in western cuisine, verbal explanation and analysis together with individual initiative are presumed to be important. For the Japanese one's individual creativity only comes after assimilating/mastering the target model.

Such an encounter between East and West learning styles begs the questions related to cultural values, social behavior and their representation in languages. For the International Cross-Cultural Communication Conference held at Harbin, China in 1995, I organized a panel which specially focused on this theme of learning values and styles in various cultures and their representation in the respective languages. The theme was initially proposed by Turner and Hiraga out of their own joint research in learning styles of Japanese and British students. The panel presentations and discussions brought a diversity of analysis and data sources to the topic, and revealed a remarkable but complementary coalescing of contrasts between the West represented by English and Greek language-cultural focii and the East with Chinese and Japanese focii.

This special issue is a result of those papers. The topic of learning styles is always vital and is timely not only for what it brings to cross-cultural understanding and potential misunderstanding but also in the domain of second language learning. These papers focusing on language and conceptualization patterns also have implications for translation and interpretation.

As in the original panel, the five basic papers here include a diversity of data sources and analytical approaches. Hiraga's paper on Japanese learning values and style is based on a study of selected proverbs and the etymologies of key words and expressions, which she argues are reflected in the traditional paradigm of Japanese learning: observing a model, practice through repetition and finally breaking with the model to be one's own master expressing one's own creativity. She focuses on four learning image-schemata: LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, LEARNING IS IMITATING A MODEL, THE TEACHER IS A FATHER, and EDUCATION IS WAR.

Turner's paper focuses on the underlying conceptual metaphors in the Western learning tradition, examining its roots in the classic Greek culture and its reflection in the contemporary British classroom. She particularly focuses on the pragmatic effect/role of questioning in the classroom, where students are expected to display either critical thinking of comparison and contrast as well as hypothesis testing.

The role of questions in the classroom is also an important theme of the Jin and Cortazzi paper. Their purpose is to examine key elements in "cultures of learning," where the classroom is an arena for intercultural communication. The culturally based values or expectations that students have about how learning in the classroom (East Asian and British) should function provides the context for their investigation into three issues: What is a good teacher? What is a good student? And why do students not use questions? Their analysis is based on the extensive data of essays and questionnaires, as well as interviews of both students and teachers encompassing Chinese, Japanese and British subjects. The results revealed interesting sets of contrasts, such as the heuristic use of questions in dialog with the teacher and/or other students expected by the British, but a reflective use of questions in a deferential, follow-up attitude by students to the teacher in East Asia. Their analysis of their data is subjected to statistical means test in cross-cultural comparisons. The profiles in good teacher/good student reveal useful contrasting, East vs West, classroom roles which are supportive of the Turner and Hiraga papers.

The Berendt and Souma paper as well as the Hiraga and Turner all grounded in the Lakoffian approach to analyzing underlying conceptual patterns in terms of various image-schemata. The latter two base their studies on selective expressions, idioms and metaphors as well as proverbs. The former paper, however, examines the domain of learning by trying to establish an extensive data base based on several pertinent genres. In addition, the Berendt and Souma paper makes a complete analysis of expressions used for learning in the data base and finally systematically compares the English and Japanese underlying conceptual patterns. Analytical issues are examined such as the multiple use of metaphors in sentence frames, etymologies vs contemporary schemata, the complex or dual metaphors in word compounds and the degree of abstraction in determining the conceptual frames.

The data-based results of the Berendt and Souma paper not only complement that of the other papers but also provide insight into the issue that Lakoff raised about universal conceptualization patterns and culturally bound patterns. The universal type of patterns that Lakoff refers to predominate in the frequency of use in both the Japanese and English data. A case in point would be the structural metaphor in Japanese of EDUCATION IS WAR and in English LEARNING IS HUNTING. While the data shows the contrasting two patterns, neither has a high frequency of use.

Another important feature of the Berendt and Souma paper is that the data has been grouped according to three pertinent genre types. This has allowed an examination of metaphoric density in the respective genre as well as individual authors with significant results; the technical writing having much higher use of multiple patterns. This suggests the flexible power of the human mind in trying to realize communication intent.

Ukida's paper analyzes the relevant proverbs in English and modern Greek on learning. Other papers also have used proverbs as a source for traditional social values in learning. In the expressions of the proverbs, metaphors are related to the different social and environmental aspects of Greece in the Mediterranean and Japan in East Asia. The final paper of Yano is based on his role of discussant in the original panel and looks at the larger issues related to the theme of learning and its possible dependency on various cultural experiences as well as the language expressions used.

Besides fruitful insight in cross-cultural learning patterns between East Asia and European traditions, there are suggestions for further research in this area, particularly is extensive data bases are developed.

