

The Performance-Based Culture

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The social script theory is based on the cognitive psychological analysis on human behavior and action. As a language teacher, I'm interested in the possibilities for applying it in the teaching of the Chinese language and culture. In this essay, I will compare the social script theory with a language teaching approach, the Performed Culture Pedagogy that has been carried out in the last decade in the Department of East Asia Language and Literature, Ohio State University, USA, under the supervision of the founder of the pedagogy, Prof. Galal Walker. I will also illustrate the importance of the social scripts while learning language and the necessity of performing the culture while teaching Chinese. However, there are still problems to be solved in the development of the social script theory and the application of the Performance-Based Pedagogy and this essay will also address them.

What are social scripts? According to St. Clair (2006), "Social scripts provide scenarios for social interaction through language in action." The social script theory "advocates a model of cognitive sociology which accounts not only for biological constructs with information processing systems, but also social constructs such as the concept of self, significant others, social roles, social relationships, defining the context of the situation, episodic memory, and social scripts."

The social script theory has been developing on the shoulders of different disciplines and theories such as Cognitive Linguistics Activity Theory, computer-based artificial intelligence, and so on. The origin of the theory can be traced back to the "Thomas Theorem" Of William Isaac Thomas, who wanted to define the context of a situation (1923). Some 30 years later, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann expanded this concept into "the social construction of reality." Their chief contributions were the three stages of the social construction of reality:

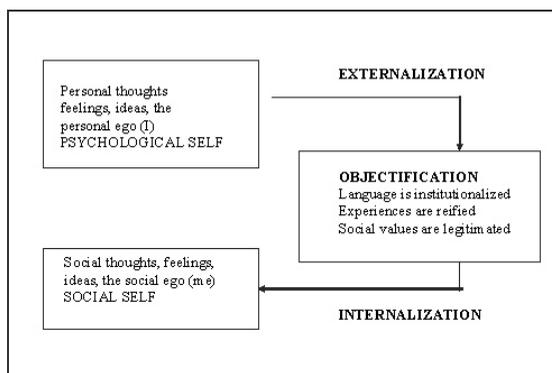


Figure 1. *Three Stages of Development of the Psychological Self and Social Self*

Table 1 Social Script: Eating at a Restaurant

The Restaurant Schema as Structured Social Activity	
Event Frame	Dining at a restaurant
Social Roles	Waiter, customer, cashier, busboy, manager, cook
Lexicon	Waiter, customer, table, main meal, deserts, tip, cashier, restaurant, the bill, the check, the menu, etc.
Script	Eat a meal at a restaurant.

(a) *externalization*, (b) *objectification*, and (c) *internalization*. They are the processes that explained the dichotomy between the psychological self and the social self. Externalization is the encoding of knowledge; objectification is the establishment and legitimating of knowledge systems, and internalization is the incorporation of social knowledge, scripts, plans and behaviors (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann pointed out that linguistic forms could not be divorced from the social worlds in which they are articulated. They articulated the relationship between these three stages and the development of the psychological self and social self as in Figure 1.

The social script theory also uses the cognitive model of Vygotsky and the Marxist model of activity theory to explain the development of a child's psychological self into a social self. A child "must develop a new social self and in the process this leads to him developing a new psychological self. In this process, he makes the cognitive leap to higher mental functions and these functions were mediated by tools and symbols articulated within the cultural milieu, the objectified world of reified language and social scripts" (St. Clair, 2006).

The concept of "social scripts" comes also from the research of artificial intelligence, the science of computers. An actor needs a script to perform on stage, and a computer needs also a script to "act" intelligently. Schank and Abelson (1977) put forward that knowledge structures must be built into computer programs as part of an a priori database and they were called "scripts." They picked the event of eating at a restaurant as an example (see Table 1).

This structured framework of knowledge enables the computer to understand the context of the situation through the media of language used in that situation.

However, the social script theory was not stopped with the accomplishment of the early cognitive scientists. It developed the ideas of Lyman and Scott (1976; 1978) of mini dramas and social acts, who argued that one constructs his social reality by participating in the events and actions taking place in the natural situation, i.e., the everyday life. These events and actions are called "episodic events" by the social script theory. As St. Clair (2006) pointed out, "One learns a social script by participating in that socially constructed event."

Social interaction is scripted. Social interaction is an episodic event that happens in everyday situations and the medium is language in action. Now, what is interesting here from the perspective of foreign language teachers?

In Chinese, there is a saying: "英雄所见略同," which means "all heroes have more or less the same opinion." Teachers of foreign languages often face the same problem of the relationship between language and social reality and some of them have come to the same conclusion as the social script theory has articulated. The Performed Culture Pedagogy is one

of them. Galal Walker and his colleagues in the Ohio State University have been carrying it out in the last one or two decades and what they are doing merits further discussion and better understanding.

Why does the Teaching of Chinese Language have to be Culture- and Performance-Based?

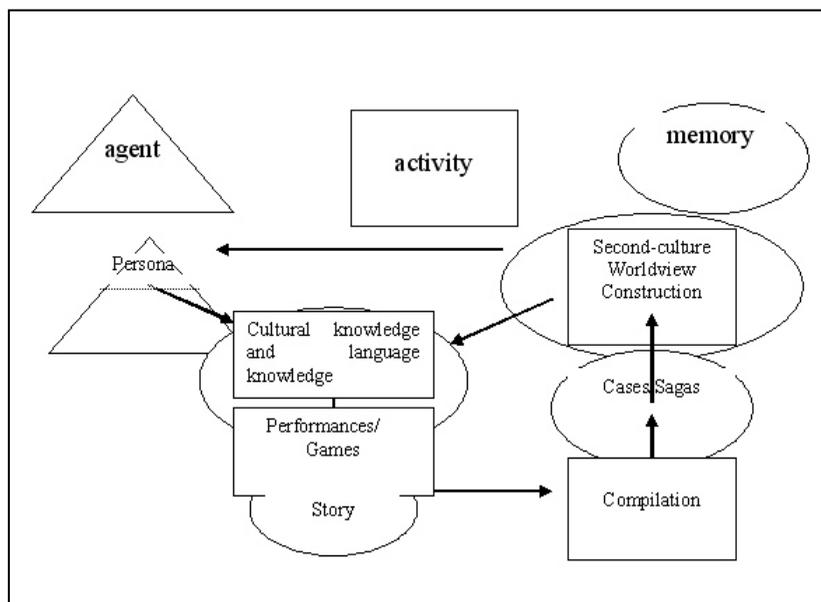
The Performed Culture Pedagogy is based on the understanding of the relationship between culture and language and the motivation of the learners of foreign languages. In the teaching of the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) in the USA, such as Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Arabic, the lack of cultural background and the differences between these languages and the languages of the learners have affected the learning of the target languages immensely. Therefore: What to teach the learners and how to teach them? Is it the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) separated from the real usage of the language in real life or the scripted social behaviors that are used by the people in the target culture? Are the practices and memorizing of grammar and vocabularies and other linguistic forms enough or are the performance of the social behaviors of people of the other culture more important? The pedagogy in question has reached the understanding of teaching LCTLs as teaching culture:

We have come to recognize that, when learning to communicate in a foreign language, our students are really learning the cultures. (Walker & Noda, 2000)

An expert learner is one who has demonstrable success interacting with members of the relevant society. An expert teacher of LCTLs is a person who is most able to assist learners in understanding the strategies and tactics of interacting with the cultures in question. (Walker, 1989)

Why does the teaching of LCTLs such as Chinese have to be performance-based? Why can't the presentational and informational model of teaching, for example, classroom lecturing and drills, meet the intention of the learners to participate in the target culture? The answer is that culture is not what we know, but what we do. In order to really understand another culture and another language, we have to use the target language and participate in the social life of the target culture. "No one really learns a foreign language. Rather, we learn how to do particular things in a foreign language; and the more things we learn to do, the more expert we are in that language" (Walker & Noda, 2000).

The way we can really learn something is not by talking about culture but by practicing it, i.e., performing. In Chinese we call those who can only talk some theories well but cannot apply it as "纸上谈兵," which means literally "directing the battle on the paper." By using the metaphor of sports, the importance of performance has been made very clear by the performed culture pedagogy. In sports, one can be a spectator of a game; he also can be a fan of the sport with more enthusiasm towards it; or he can act as a commenter of a sport event if he has obtained enough knowledge about the game. However, those roles are all very different with the role of a player. He does not merely need the knowledge about the game, he has also to be trained to play the game according of the scoring system of it and he has to be able to act



spontaneously with his body (Walker & Noda, 2000). The purpose of the Performance-Based Pedagogy is to train the language learners to become the player of other culture, i.e., to interact with the real man and woman in the target culture and to act and score successfully. The social script theory has come to the almost same conclusion:

“Those who know how to perform in the theater of life (Goffman, 1959; 1967; 1974) will be in character and have success in following the script that they have been handed. They who fail at these tasks will be out of character or will be performing the wrong role at the wrong time or in the wrong place.” (St. Clair, 2006)

In the realm of drama, there are five elements: time, place, role, script, and the audience. Carlson has made it more specific: “Performances, in foreign language pedagogy as well as in other venues, are conscious repetitions of situated events that are defined by five specified elements: a) place of occurrence, b) time of occurrence, c) appropriate script/program/rules, d) roles of participants, and e) accepting and/or accepted audience” (Carlson, 1996).

The Performance-Based Pedagogy also emphasize these five elements and it has developed a *cycle of compilation* to describe the process for the language learner in the learning environment: agent, triangle, activity, rectangle, memory, and oval.

According to Walker and Noda (2000), *persona* is the starting point and the sole agent in the learning of a foreign language. *Cultural knowledge* and *language knowledge* is the memory based on information about culture and language. *Performances/games* are the enactment of scripts or behaviors situated at a specified time and place with roles and audiences specified. *Story* is the personal memory of having experienced a performance or a game. *Compilation*, by putting stories together, results to form larger knowledge domains in

the learners. *Cases* and *sagas*: a *case* is a series of stories about doing something in a culture; A *saga* is a series of stories about a specific set of people or a specific location. They are dealing with what a learner is capable of dealing with in the target culture. *Second-Culture Worldview Construction* is the compilation of stories into the knowledge of a learned culture (Walker & Noda, 2000).

However, the theory is not ended here. The application of it in the classroom of the LCTLs such as Chinese is not a light mission and some problems need to be further studied and overcome.

Problem Left Unsolved: How Many Cases/Sagas are there in the Foreign Language Teaching?

Let's use the restaurant schema to illustrate the cycle of compilation. "Restaurants have *menus, waiters, bus boys, utensils, serving ware, tables, chairs, cashiers*, and other related items. Furthermore, there are certain kinds of protocol statements or designated requests that can be effortlessly associated with restaurants. One asks for a menu, one orders a meal, one may ask for a dessert cart, and one asks for the check before going to the cashier to pay for the meal and exiting the culinary place of business" (St. Clair, 2006). A learner learns how to behave correctly in the target culture to eat in a restaurant. He experienced (performed) many times eating in restaurants (stories) and built up his cases and sagas on the restaurant schema. Now he can have his new understanding of the second culture and his persona is somehow different.

However, everyday life is like a river and it moves and changes all the time. Language and culture are the same as rivers. How could we divide life into countable episodic events? If we can, how many are there? How many cases and sagas have we to compile? It is also the question for the social script theory. We understand that social behavior is scripted. We need to know how many social scripts there are. This is the problem that foreign language teachers and the sociologists need to solve in the future.

Conclusion

Social script theory has explained the cognitive understanding of the construction of the social reality, and intends to explore further those scripts that are behind people's interactions in society. The pedagogues of the Performed Culture are interested in examining the details of the social interactions too; however, they also want to carry their mission further: to train the learners of foreign languages to become a successful player in the target culture. Performance has been used as a metaphor by both theories and I believe that both theories will have further success because they have all captured the essence of life: Life is a stage, and we all have to play our right roles according to our given scripts, at the right time, in the right place, and in front of our audience.

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