

Japanese Cultural Scripts: Cultural Psychology and “Cultural Grammar”

ANNA WIERZBICKA

To describe a language we need to describe, first of all, its vocabulary and its grammar.¹ The task of describing a culture can be approached in many different ways, but I suggest that one useful and illuminating way of doing so is to adopt the linguistic model, and to describe a society's "key words" (embodying key cultural concepts) and its "cultural grammar"—that is, a set of subconscious rules that shape a people's ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and interacting. In an earlier study (Wierzbicka 1991b) I have noted several Japanese key words and discussed their cultural significance. In this article I will focus more specifically on Japanese cultural rules.

In a number of publications (Wierzbicka 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, in press a) I have tried to show that the cultural norms that underlie a society's characteristic ways of speaking and interacting can be represented explicitly in the form of "cultural scripts," formulated in terms of lexical universals, that is, universal human concepts, lexicalized in all languages of the world. I have argued that by representing them in this way we can achieve a universal, language-independent perspective that will free our analysis from ethnocentric bias and that will facilitate cross-cultural comparison and cross-cultural understanding.

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The cultural scripts approach to social interaction does not assume that cultures are homogeneous, or that social practices and mores can be described in the form of neat compulsory rules characterizing everybody's actual behavior. It acknowledges that cultures are heterogeneous, and that social behavior in general, and speech behavior in particular, shows a great deal of variation. At the same time, it assumes the reality of certain implicit cultural ideologies, which can shape not only people's actual behavior but, even more, their assumptions and expectations. Cultural norms can be violated, ignored, or rebelled against, but this does not change the fact that both the norms that people (consciously or unconsciously) obey and those they (consciously or unconsciously) violate differ from one cultural system to another.

In this article I am going to apply the cultural scripts approach to certain aspects of Japanese culture. In particular, I am going to analyze some scenarios taken from a book by Hiroko Kataoka, *Japanese Cultural Encounters* (1991). I will try to show how the intended message of these stories can be made clearer and more precise by the use of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage, based on universal semantic primitives;² and how this metalanguage can be used as a universal and self-explanatory "culture notation" (Hall 1976:166). Though I will draw on the extensive literature on Japanese culture and society, for reasons of space I cannot discuss the literature here.³ However, a recent attack on the very idea of comparing Japanese and Anglo cultural norms and communicative patterns does require an answer.

In an article entitled "Japanese Superiority Proven by Discourse Analysis" McCreary attacks "academic writing that implicitly or explicitly compares aspects of Western culture (especially American) to Japanese counterparts such as social ideas, customs, and linguistic features, and that consistently judges the Japanese features to be unique and by implication superior to the Western" (1992:312). At the same time he praises those Japanese linguists who "do not draw sweeping generalizations, fabricate false dichotomies or try to tie their work to the myth of Japanese uniqueness. They instead stay within the Japanese language with copious examples and rigorous, principled analysis, and do not feel the need to compare it to any Western language."

One can understand McCreary's and some other Western scholars' impatience with what Dale (1986, 1988) calls "the myth of

Japanese uniqueness." But surely objecting to any meaningful comparisons between Japanese and American communication patterns is tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It should hardly be necessary to point out that *every* culture is unique and has its own culture-specific communication patterns. Japanese culture is indeed no more unique than any other culture, but this does not mean that it has no unique (characteristic) features, that these features should not be described, that comparisons between different cultural patterns are not legitimate and indeed necessary, and that *unique* (or *culture-specific*) has to imply "superior."

No one would question the need for "rigorous, principled analysis" or the value of "copious examples," but the call for "staying within the Japanese language" (without venturing to compare Japanese patterns with any others, and, in particular, with Anglo-American patterns) is bizarre. Surely that much caution is unreasonable and self-defeating?

It goes without saying that cross-cultural comparisons must be careful and rigorous; they must also be supported with evidence. This article offers a new framework for cross-cultural comparison of communication patterns; at the same time it draws attention to the value of linguistic evidence in establishing and validating such comparisons.

McCreary ridicules what he calls "the myth of Japanese heart vs. Western mind," but in doing so he overlooks the fact that the key Japanese word *kokoro* (roughly, "heart/mind") does mean something different from the English word *mind*, and that it provides evidence for a different folk model of person (see Mutch 1987; Wierzbicka 1989, 1992). He pays no attention to Japanese key words such as *enryo*, *wa* (see Wierzbicka 1991b) or *omoiyari* (see Travis 1992), and to the light they throw on Japanese communication patterns. Similarly, he overlooks the fact that the ubiquitous Japanese particle *ne* (one of the most important devices of Japanese "back-channeling," which has no exact semantic equivalent in English) provides evidence of different communicative norms (see Cook 1990; Wierzbicka 1994b). Blinded by his excessive fear of cross-linguistic comparison, McCreary ignores all evidence of this kind, and by doing so he fails to comply with his own call for "rigorous, principled analysis" (presumably, of all relevant data).

APOLOGY AND SELF-DEFENSE

In the literature on Japanese culture and society it is often said that in Japan it is important to apologize very frequently and in a broad range of situations. The experience of Western students of Japanese is consistent with such statements. As Coulmas reports, "a Western student who has been taught Japanese experiences the extensive usage of apology expressions as a striking feature of everyday communication when he first comes to Japan" (1981:81). Correspondingly, "among Japanese students of English, German, or other European languages, it is a common mistake to make apologies where no such acts are expected or anticipated in the respective speech community."

The Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi recalls in this connection an observation made by the Christian missionary Father Henvers about "the magical power of apology in Japan," and he comments: "It is particularly noteworthy that a Christian missionary, who came to Japan to preach forgiveness of sin, should have been so impressed by the realization that among Japanese a heartfelt apology leads easily to reconciliation" (1981:50). To illustrate this point, Doi recounts the experience of an American psychiatrist in Japan who, through some oversight in carrying out immigration formalities, "found himself hauled over the coals by an official of the Immigration Bureau." However often he explained that it was not really his fault, the official would not be appeased until, at the end of his tether, he said "I'm sorry" as a prelude to a further argument, whereupon the official's expression suddenly changed and he dismissed the matter without further ado. Doi concludes his discussion with a characteristic comment that "people in the West . . . are generally speaking reluctant to apologize" (1981:51).

But observations such as those made by Coulmas and Doi, though revealing, are not specific enough to be truly effective in any attempt to "teach culture." To begin with, the concept of "apology" itself is culture-bound and is therefore inappropriate as a descriptive and analytical tool in the cross-cultural field. The words *apology* and *apologize*, which are elements of the English set of speech act terms, include in their meaning the component "I did something bad (to you)." But as Doi's little anecdote illustrates, the so-called Japanese apology does not presuppose such a compo-

nent. It is misleading and confusing, therefore, to call it an apology in the first place.

Furthermore, those who talk of the extensive usage of apologies in Japan (as compared with the West) create an impression that the difference is quantitative, not qualitative. This is misleading and inaccurate: in fact, the difference lies not in the frequency of use of the same speech act, but in the use of qualitatively different speech acts (see Wierzbicka 1991a); and the use of these different speech acts is linked with qualitatively different cultural norms. Norms of this kind can be usefully illustrated with schematic scenarios, such as Kataoka's scenario entitled "Apology":

Tom rented a car one weekend. It was his first time driving a car in Japan, but he had been an excellent driver in the United States.

On his way to a friend's house, however, he had an accident. A young child about four years old ran into the street from an alley just as Tom was driving by. Tom was driving under the speed limit and he was watching the road carefully, so he stepped on the brakes immediately. However, the car did brush against the child, causing him to fall down. Tom immediately stopped the car and asked a passerby to call the police and an ambulance.

Fortunately, the child's injuries were minor. The police did not give Tom a ticket, and he was told that he was not at fault at all, thanks to some witnesses' reports. He felt sorry for the child but decided that there was nothing more he could do, so he tried to forget about the accident. However, after several days, Tom heard from the policeman that the child's parents were extremely upset about Tom's response to the incident. [1991:2]

Kataoka invites the reader to consider four alternative answers to the question "Why were the child's parents upset?" The following answer is then indicated as the correct one: "They were angry because Tom did not apologize to them, nor did he visit the child at the hospital, even though he was not at fault. Tom should have done these things to show his sincerity." Kataoka comments further: "In Japan, one is expected to apologize and visit the victim of an accident, even if one is not at fault, to show his or her sincerity. In fact, one is expected to apologize whenever the other party involved suffers in any way, materially or emotionally. In many court cases, perpetrators get a lighter sentence when it is clear that they regret their actions, as reflected in their apology" (1991:64).

The cultural norm reflected in Kataoka's story and explanatory comments can be represented in the form of the following cultural script (written in lexical universals):

- (1) when something bad happens to someone because I did something
 I have to say something like this to this person:
 "I feel something bad"
 I have to do something because of this

The cultural rule in question was clearly illustrated by the sudden resignation on April 8, 1994, of the Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa. According to reports in the *Australian*, Mr. Hosokawa said that "the scandal over his financial dealings was 'extremely regrettable' because it had prevented the Parliament from passing the budget and hindered his reform plans. . . . Mr Hosokawa said there was nothing wrong with the two loans he accepted during the 1980s, but he felt morally responsible for the parliamentary impasse" (April 9, 1994:12).

Thus Mr. Hosokawa didn't say that he had done anything bad, but he admitted that something bad (a parliamentary impasse) happened because of something that he had done (accepted two loans). This admission made it necessary for him to say, publicly, that he felt something bad because of what had happened, and this, in turn, made it necessary for him to do something (resign), to show that he really did feel something bad (that is, to prove his sincerity). Thus the cultural scenario enacted by the prime minister corresponds exactly to the one which in Kataoka's story should have been enacted—and wasn't—by Tom. The resignation was presented in the form of the following script:

- (2) I did something
 something bad happened because of this
 I feel something bad because of this
 I have to do something because of this

In another recent episode (reported in the *Weekend Australian*, May 28–29, 1994: 11) two Japanese widows issued an open letter to "apologize" to the people of the Australian Northern Territory for the "trouble" caused by their husbands' death (in a racing accident). In this case, too, there was no implication that the husbands had done anything bad; rather, the idea was that something bad happened (an accident, and a lot of "trouble") because the two men had done something (had taken part in a car race). The widows felt that they had to say publicly that they felt something bad—not because of what happened to them but because of the "bad feelings" the accident had caused for other people.

Kataoka also discusses Japanese “apologies” in connection with a different vignette, entitled “Self-Defense”:

One morning at the Japanese company where Bob worked part-time, he took a finished document to his boss's office. His boss checked the document very carefully and pointed out a critical mistake in it. He also told him that the document should have been submitted earlier.

The document was late because Bob hadn't had access to the word-processor at the office until very recently. As for the mistake in the document, Bob noticed that it was made by a colleague of his, and not by him. Bob explained these things to his boss calmly and very politely in Japanese, showing that he was not at fault. Having listened to Bob, the boss looked displeased and suddenly said to him in English, “I don't want to hear such excuses. Do this again, and give it to me before you go home today!”

Bob left the boss's office, feeling upset. He didn't understand why his boss had become offended since he had done nothing wrong. Bob didn't know what to do. [1991:16]

This time the question is “Why do you think Bob's boss got mad at Bob?” and the correct answer is “Bob made an excuse and failed to apologize. Apologies are very important in Japan.” This is accompanied by the following comment: “If Bob had been apologetic, the reactions of his boss would have been more favorable. Apologies are used very often among Japanese people to show sincerity, and to reassure others that the person recognizes responsibility and wants to cooperate” (1991:81).

In this case, the cultural norm involved can be represented as follows:

- (3) when someone says to me something like this:
 - “you did something
 - something bad happened (to someone/to me) because of this”
 - it is good to say something like this to this person:
 - “I feel something bad because of this”
 - it is bad to say something like this to this person:
 - “I didn't do anything bad”

In Japanese culture it is not good to say “I didn't do anything bad”; presumably, it is not good to even think this (see Kitayama and Markus 1992). In Kataoka's stories, the cultural outsider, Bob, actually said (more or less), “I didn't do anything bad.” The other outsider, Tom, didn't say that, but his attitude suggested that he thought something along those lines. That was “wrong.” Had he thought, instead, of other people's feelings, and of his own role in the events that caused other people's “bad feelings” (“someone else

felt something bad because I did something”), he would have been more likely to behave in a culturally prescribed manner. Thus the two stories illustrate some of the major postulates of Japanese social interaction:

- (4) it is not good to say something like this to other people:
“I didn’t do anything bad”
- (5) if someone feels something bad because I did something
it is good to say something like this to this person:
“I feel something bad because of this”

The importance of paying attention to other people’s “bad feelings” that we may have caused is reflected in a number of other cultural rules, which can only be mentioned here in passing. One often commented on has to do with the “blurring of apologies and thanks” in Japanese culture (see Coulmas 1981). In Anglo culture there is a basic rule that requires people to respond to, roughly speaking, favors in a positive way:

- (6) when someone did something good for me
I have to say something like this to the person:
“I feel something good because of this”

This is in direct contrast with situations when one has to apologize to other people. Roughly:

- (7) When I did something bad to someone
I have to say something like this to this person:
“I feel something bad because of this”

But in Japanese culture there is no similar contrast between the two types of situations, and in both a negative response is appropriate. The common use of the same response—*sumimasen* (literally, “it never ends” or “it is not finished”; see Benedict 1947; Coulmas 1981)—provides telling evidence for the perceived similarity between the two types of situation.

- (8) when I know that I did something bad to someone
I have to say something like this to this person:
“I feel something bad because of this”
- (9) when I know that someone did something good to me
it is good to say something like this to this person:

"I feel something bad because of this"

The Japanese rule that links reception of favors with the need to express bad feelings is puzzling to Westerners; and, as mentioned earlier, it is often described from a Western point of view as an incomprehensible blurring of the boundary between apologies and thanks. But from the point of view of Japanese cultural logic, this rule makes perfect sense because it reflects the speakers' watchful attention to any trouble that they may have caused.

As Coulmas writes, "The Japanese conception of gifts and favours focusses on the trouble they have caused the benefactor rather than the aspects which are pleasing to the recipient" (1981:83). Hence a fuller form of the Japanese rule in question would be:

- (10) when someone does something good for me
 it is good to say something like this to this person:
 "you did something good for me
 you felt something bad because of this"
 I feel something bad because of this"

The same script explains also why, as Coulmas points out, Japanese dinner guests on leaving would say something like "I have intruded on you" or "disturbances have been done to you" rather than "thank you so much for the wonderful evening."

My general point is that English words such as *apology* or *thanks* are not suitable for describing Japanese cultural logic. Cultural scripts such as

- (11) It is bad if someone feels something bad because of me
 or

- (12) when someone feels something bad because of me
 it is good to say something like this to this person:
 "I feel something bad because of this"

are, in my view, far more accurate and more illuminating. Importantly, scripts of this kind characterize not just Japanese "politeness," but, more generally, Japanese ethics and Japanese social psychology. The "rules" for saying or not saying this or that are closely linked with culturally shaped "rules" for thinking and feeling—such as the crucial Japanese "rule" that demands anticipating and preventing other people's "bad feelings" (cf. Lebra 1976):

- (13) it is good to often think something like this of other people:
 "if I do something, this person may feel something bad because of this"

I don't want this"

It would be impossible to try to justify all these scripts within the confines of this article. In a sense, they present in a crystalized form generalizations about Japanese culture that have been reached, and amply documented, in numerous books and articles (see, e.g., Honna and Hoffer 1989; Lebra 1976; Mizutani and Mizutani 1987; Smith 1983). My purpose here is different: I am proposing a new metalanguage for cultural analysis, a new "cultural notation"; and I am trying to show how the use of this metalanguage can allow us to sharpen and to clarify generalizations put forward and largely justified elsewhere.

SELF-EFFACEMENT AND SELF-DISPARAGEMENT

In their comparison of American culture and Japanese culture Kitayama and Markus contrast the American norms of "self-enhancement" with the Japanese norm of "self-effacement." They write:

we will focus on one particular phenomenon that has proved to be extremely robust and powerful in Western literature, namely, the tendency to take credits for one's successes and blame others for failures. This phenomenon of self-enhancement is particularly intriguing because it largely disappears in other, especially Asian cultures, and is replaced by a phenomenon that appears as self-effacement. . . . Overall, self-enhancement seems highly pervasive and robust in American culture; but hardly so in Japanese culture. . . . Self-effacement may be seen, from a perspective of an independent construal of the self, as a result of tactical self-presentation designed to convince others that one is modest—a desirable trait in many non-Western cultures. [1992:15]

Passages of this kind are suggestive and, I think, illuminating, but it is not quite clear what exactly the authors mean. The use of cultural scripts not only allows us but also *forces* us to be precise. Furthermore, the terms they use in their analysis show a clear anglocentric bias: after all, *self-effacement* is an English word that reflects an Anglo perspective, and that has a mildly but distinctly pejorative character. Whatever interpretation of Kitayama and Markus's claims we choose, we can state it in universal terms and without an anglocentric bias. As a starting point for further discussion, I would propose the following scripts:

- (14) *Anglo "self-enhancement" script*:
it is good to often think something like this:

"I did something very good
 I can do things like this
 not everyone can do things like this
 other people don't often do things like this"

(15) *Japanese "self-effacement" script:*

it is good to often think something like this:

"I did something bad
 I often do things like this
 not everyone does things like this
 other people don't often do things like this"

The use of scripts forces us to formulate hypotheses more precise than those that can be expressed with vague, undefined terms such as *self-enhancement* and *self-effacement*. For example, we have to make up our minds whether we want to say that "it is good to *think* something" or that "it is good to *say* something." If, from an American point of view, Japanese self-effacement (as Kitayama and Markus say) "may be seen . . . as a result of tactical self-presentation designed to convince others that one is modest," this seems to suggest that the Japanese norm concerns what one says rather than what one thinks. But the fact that the studies referred to by Kitayama and Markus seem to show that Americans tend to have a higher opinion of themselves than the Japanese suggests an interpretation referring to "thinking" and not just "saying."⁵

Furthermore, a more recent paper by Kitayama et al. makes it clear that what is actually claimed has to do with "thinking" at least as much as with "saying," and that any special emphasis on self-presentation would reflect an American interpretation of the Japanese norm rather than the Japanese norm itself.

From a Western, independent point of view, this self-deprecative tendency might appear to be a deliberate self-presentational tactic of impressing others by behaving in an appropriately modest fashion. Although such a tactic can always come into play, this can hardly explain the entire pattern of findings. [1995:538]

Trying to explain the cultural rationale of the Japanese self-effacement rules, Kitayama et al. put forward an interesting interpretive hypothesis, linking these rules with the general cultural emphasis on interdependence and the need to "fit in":

It is likely . . . that the Japanese tendency for self-depreciation represents a form of adaptation to the cultural environment constructed with the core cultural idea of self as an inter-dependent entity. With fitting-in and interpersonal adjustment as an important cultural task, those socialized in the Japanese culture may be

extensively trained to be attentive to negative features of the self . . . because they have to find them before they make appropriate corrections to them and, hence, increase the extent of the fit of the self with situational expectations and social norms. [1995:539]

From a linguistic point of view, it is interesting to note that lexical evidence clearly supports the ideas put forward by Kitayama et al.: in English, *self-esteem* is a common, everyday word, whereas *self-aversion* barely exists at all; by contrast, in Japanese, *jiko-keno* (roughly, “self-aversion”) is a common, everyday word, whereas the status of *jisons(h)in* (roughly, “self-esteem”) is precarious (rather like the English *self-aversion*). This lexical contrast suggests that for speakers of English the idea of thinking something good about oneself, and feeling something good because of this, is more important and more salient than thinking something bad about oneself and feeling something bad because of this; for speakers of Japanese, the opposite is true.

Assuming, then, that some of the Japanese self-effacement norms concern, as argued by Kitayama et al., what one thinks, and not only what one says, it must be noted that there are undoubtedly also important scripts for “saying.” These include, in particular, the “success-due-to-luck” scripts (Kitayama et al. comment, “several extant studies have demonstrated that Japanese are bound to attribute their success to either effort or good luck” [1994:5]). One of these scripts can be formulated as follows:

- (16) when someone says to me something like this:
 “something good happened to you because you did something good”
 it is good to say something like this to this person:
 “I can’t think this
 this good thing happened
 not because I did something good”

The reality of cultural norms is best seen in cross-cultural encounters, where things often go wrong. The scale of cultural misunderstandings may be difficult to document, but this does not make them any less real or any less important in the life of individuals such as Kataoka’s Tom or Bob, and in the life of multicultural societies such as Australia or the United States. Here is another of Kataoka’s fictitious but highly credible illustrative vignettes (“Terrible Son”):

Bob’s family has been hosting a Japanese exchange student, Tomio, for about 6 months. Tomio is a model guest and a model student: he gets along with everyone

in the family, he helps the family with household chores, he is outgoing and has made numerous friends, and he receives excellent grades at school. He has truly been a joy for the entire family.

One day Tomio's father visited Bob's family during a business trip to the United States. He thanked Bob's parents for taking care of his son, who "couldn't do anything himself, has very bad manners, and is selfish." He even apologized that he and his wife had not done a good job of bringing up their son to be a gentleman like Bob. When Bob's parents disagreed with these criticisms and praised Tomio, Tomio's father looked really embarrassed and apologized even more about his "stupid and terrible son." Tomio, however, was smiling as his father was saying horrible things about him! Bob started to get angry with Tomio's father and wondered what was wrong. [1991:18]

Kataoka asks, "What was wrong? Why did Tomio's father say such things?" She answers the question herself:

Tomio's father really doesn't believe what he says. In his heart he knows that Tomio is an outstanding young man, and he is very proud of his son. Japanese people often show their respect to others by humbling themselves, however, and this often takes the form of denigrating themselves and their family members. [1991:18]

And she elaborates:

It is very common for Japanese people to disparage themselves and their family members as an expression of humility. Tomio's father must be extremely proud of his son; the fact that Tomio was smiling as his father criticized him indicates that Tomio understood what was going on. [1994:111]

Kataoka's comments are helpful, but she doesn't really offer a clear generalization. First, the words *denigrate*, *disparage*, and *criticize*, which she uses interchangeably, don't all mean the same thing, and while they do have a common core, it has not been stated explicitly. Second, we are not told in what situations Japanese people are expected to "denigrate/disparage/criticize" themselves and their family members. Third, she speaks as if the same cultural norm applied to oneself and one's family members, whereas in fact her illustrative stories suggest more differentiated norms.

Trying to sharpen and to clarify the norm illustrated by "Terrible Son," I would propose the following:

- (17) when someone says to me something good about my children
 - I can't say something like this to this person:
 - "I think the same"
 - I have to say something like this:
 - "I can't think this"
 - I have to say something bad about my children at the same time

it is good if I say something bad about me at the same time

Similarly lacking in precision are the following generalizations: "It is not polite to accept praise in Japan. One is supposed to deny praise and humble oneself" (1991:113) or "modesty is highly valued in Japanese society. Denial of compliments is a good example of this cultural value" (1991:100).

One possible interpretation is to conclude that what applies to praise directed at one's children applies also to praise directed at oneself:

- (18) when someone says to me something good about me
 I can't say something like this to this person:
 "I think the same"
 I have to say something like this to this person:
 "I can't think this"
 it is good if I say something bad about me at the same time

What makes this script somewhat problematic, however, is that, according to many writers (see Honna and Hoffer 1989:74, 240; Mizutani and Mizutani 1987:43–46), Japanese cultural norms discourage direct praise of the addressee (although they don't seem to discourage praise of the addressee's family members, at least not to the same extent). It may be more accurate, therefore, to distinguish between praise directed at the addressee's family members from praise directed at the addressee, and to propose a more specific rule for the latter case, referring to the addressee's ability rather than, more generally, to good things that can be said about him or her:

- (19) when someone says to me something like this:
 "you did X very well"
 I know now that you can do this very well"
 I have to say something like this to this person:
 "I can't think this"
 "I know that I can't do this very well"

This script is (partially) supported by another of Kataoka's stories, "Compliment," concerning another American in Japan:

As soon as Mike arrived in Japan, he discovered the Japanese to be very nice people—they praised him wherever he went! He couldn't remember how many people had commented on how well he spoke Japanese. He was delighted each time his Japanese was complimented, and he responded with "Arigatoo gozaimasu" ("Thank you very much."). After all, he deserved it; he had never studied

so hard as when he started studying the Japanese language. . . . One day, however, Mike was warned by one of his friends that he should not say “arigatoo gozaimasu” so often. Mike was totally puzzled. [1991:113]

Kataoka comments, “Regardless of Mike’s true ability in Japanese Mike is not supposed to accept praise with straight thank yous. The Japanese normally deny such compliments by saying, ‘ie, ie’ (‘No, no.’). This act is a way of showing one’s humility.” In this case there is no mention of the need to say something bad about oneself, or even of the need to deny one’s ability. Other accounts, however, including the following vignette from Kataoka’s book (“Denying a Compliment”), suggest that something along these lines is at least desirable:

Larry came to Japan to teach conversational English at a small private school in Tokyo. One day he went to a party held at one of his students’ homes. He spoke English with his students there. They were from a beginner’s class, but Larry found their English was fairly good; he praised each of them for their command of English. He expected that they would reply with “Thank you,” but all of them refused to accept his compliment. Instead they smiled pleasantly and commented on how much they had yet to learn.

Later, one of them played the guitar and sang a song. Larry praised the student’s performance. The student looked embarrassed and denied the compliment, but he smiled and played an encore! As Larry was leaving, he thanked the hostess for the meal and told her that she was a good cook. The hostess seemed pleased, but she too gave a negative reply to the compliment, saying that she would prefer serving something nicer to a foreign guest but her abilities were limited. Larry thought it odd and vaguely disappointing that none of the Japanese at the party responded positively to his compliments. [1991:6]

Clearly, both Mike’s and Larry’s difficulties are due to the fact that they take for granted—even when in Japan—the following Anglo-American cultural script:

- (20) when someone says to me something like this:
 “you can do X very well”
 I have to say something like this to this person:
 “I know: you say this because you want me to feel something good
 I feel something good because of this”

Since in Anglo-American culture there are no constraints on praising the addressee, such as operate in Japanese culture, this script can be seen as a specific instance of a more general Anglo-American cultural norm:

- (21) when someone says to me something good about me

I have to say something like this to this person:

"I know: you say this because you want me to feel something good

I feel something good toward you because of this"

The phrase "I have to" is not meant to imply that in Anglo-American culture everyone always response to praise or compliments by saying "thank you," but that this kind of response is virtually obligatory in the predominant cultural model. Since America is a complex, multiethnic society, embracing a variety of subcultures and different cultural traditions, the predominant model portrayed above is not the only one, and of course even if it were the only one, individual speakers could still choose to disregard it, but neither of these facts detracts from the validity of the model as such.

EXPRESSION—OR NONEXPRESSION—OF ONE'S WANTS

In a story entitled "Do You Want To . . ." Kataoka presents the following example of miscommunication:

Mr Kato dropped in at Linda's apartment to say hello to her. She led him into the living room and asked, "Nani ka nomitai desu ka?" ("Do you want something to drink?") Mr Kato seemed to be at a loss how to reply. Linda continued, "Ocha to koohii ga arimasu kedo, dochira ga nomitai desu ka?" ("I have tea and coffee. Which do you want to drink?") Mr Kato at last opened his mouth, "Dochira demo ii desu" ("Either will be fine."). Linda decided to make two cups of coffee. She asked him if he wanted sugar and milk. He paused for a moment and said yes, hesitantly. Becoming irritated at his indecisive manner, Linda served the coffee. While Linda and Mr Kato were talking, Linda wondered if he wanted to go to a party that night. She asked, "Konban paatii ga aru n desu kedo, issho ni ikitai desu ka?" ("There is a party tonight. Do you want to go with me?") Mr Kato said no, with an unpleasant look. Linda was getting upset at his attitude. He didn't seem to have a pleasant time with Linda despite her kindness in offering him a beverage and inviting him to a party. [1991:47]

Kataoka asks, "Why do you think Mr Kato behaved in such a way?" and answers, "Mr Kato was upset with Linda because she was rude." She elaborates as follows:

The *-tai* (want to do) form should never be used when one offers something and/or invites someone to do something. In Japan, individual preferences and desires are usually not asked or stated directly: hosts typically serve drinks without requiring their guests to make a choice. When suggesting a joint activity like attending a party together, the negative question form becomes a polite invitation, as in *issho ni ikimasen ka*, much like the polite English, "Won't you go with me?" [1991:66]

But while the “negative question” can be used as a “polite invitation” in both Japanese and English, clearly, “want” questions (“do you want to . . .”) are culturally inappropriate in Japanese, whereas they are perfectly normal in English. This suggests the following contrast in cultural scripts:

- (22) *Anglo:*
 when I want to do something good for someone
 it is good to say something like this to this person:
 “I want to know what you want”

- (23) *Japanese:*
 when I want to do something good for someone
 I can’t say something like this to this person:
 “I want to know what you want”

The constraint on asking other people about their wants (wishes, desires, preferences) is closely linked to the constraints on expressing those wants. In very general terms, this norm can be stated as follows:

- (24) I can’t say something like this to other people:
 “I want this, I don’t want this”

This norm is directly opposed to the Anglo norms of free self-expression and self-assertion: in Anglo culture it is assumed that everyone can say what he or she wants and that it is good to express one’s wants clearly and unequivocally (see Tannen 1981, 1986; Wierzbicka 1991a):

- (25) everyone can say something like this:
 “I want this, I don’t want this”

- (26) It is good to say what I want

The second rule here applies in particular to situations when my “wants” affect other people—for example, when someone is proposing to do something for me, or with me:

- (27) when someone says to me something like this:
 “I want to do something good for you
 I want to know whether you want me to do it
 I want to know what you want”
 it is good to say to this person what I want

- (28) when someone says to me something like this:
 “I want to do something [together] with you⁶

I want to know whether you want this"
It is good to say to this person whether I want this

In Japanese, however, the rules are different. As noted earlier, when one wants to do something good for someone (for example, provide food), one doesn't ask what he or she wants; thus the question of how to answer such an "offer" doesn't arise. The basic scenario for Japanese hospitality can be represented in the form of the following script (see Befu 1974; Lebra 1976):

- (29) when I want someone to feel something good
it is not good to say to this person something like this:
 "I want to know what you want"
it is good to think about it
if I think about it I can know what I can do
this person doesn't have to say anything

On the other hand, when a joint activity is proposed, an answer is necessary, but it doesn't have to express the speaker's genuine wants. This is illustrated (from one particular angle) in another of Kataoka's stories, "Undecided":

Phyllis works in a Japanese company. She and her section chief were discussing her proposal for improving work conditions that she had written up and submitted to him a month earlier. As they talked, Phyllis became frustrated because her section chief seemed noncommittal. Instead of concentrating on the specifics of her plan about the budgetary problems involved, he talked vaguely and about what other people in the section would think. Phyllis felt this was irrelevant because he had the authority to control the budget and to make decisions without depending on subordinates. When Phyllis asked him if he would accept her proposal, he said, "I'll think about it." Then he changed the subject.

Later Phyllis heard from a colleague that the section chief had turned down her proposal. She wondered why the section chief had not told her directly that the plan would not be implemented. [1991:19]

Kataoka asks, "Why do you think the section chief was so noncommittal during their initial conversation?" and answers, "The section chief actually didn't want to accept Phyllis's proposal. He hoped Phyllis would understand his hesitancy indicated his rejection of the proposal." Then she elaborates:

Most Japanese people tend to avoid a direct no to a request, proposal, or invitation. A direct no indicates a strong refusal in Japanese culture, which is rude and is apt to hurt the other's feelings. In Japan, people prefer to make refusals indirectly (as seen in the section chief's noncommittal attitude), and they are also expected to understand what this sort of behavior signals. [1991:67]

As I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Wierzbicka 1991a), words such as *direct* and *indirect* are far too vague to be able to be of much use as explanatory descriptive categories in cultural analysis. I submit that the cultural norms illustrated in the story can be portrayed with far greater clarity and precision in the form of the following script (among others):

- (30) when someone says to me something like this:
 "I think it would be good if you did X"
 I can't say something like this to this person:
 "I don't think the same
 I don't want to do it"
 this person could feel something bad because of this

The rule spelled out above is often referred to in the literature on Japan as a prohibition on saying no (see Ueda 1974), but of course this is far too general: in many situations, saying no is not only allowed but necessary in Japanese culture.

The avoidance of saying no in the cultural scenario illustrated in this section is closely linked with a number of further cultural assumptions, which can be spelled out as follows:

- (31) I can do something else
 (I can say nothing, I can say something else)
 If I do this, this person will know what I think

In Japanese culture there is a close logical link between rules for "not saying" something and the expectation that people can and will understand other people's unspoken thoughts (see Lebra 1976; Wierzbicka 1994b, in press a).

It is easy to see that the avoidance of saying no in the scenario illustrated in this section is related to the Japanese cultural values of *enryo* and *wa* (see Wierzbicka 1991b) and to the more general cultural rules that can be represented as follows (see Wierzbicka 1991a):

- (32) I can't say something like this to other people:
 "I think this, I don't think this"
- (33) I can't say something like this to other people:
 "I want this, I don't want this"
- (34) when someone says something to me
 I can't say something like this to this person:
 "I don't think the same"

All these “can’t” rules would no doubt make social interaction difficult and frustrating if they were not supplemented by positive rules for “reading other people’s minds” and guessing their unexpressed wants and feelings—in the spirit of *omoiyari* (see Lebra 1976; Travis 1992) and related cultural attitudes (see Kataoka’s comments about her sector chief: “He hoped Phyllis would understand that his hesitancy indicated his rejection of the proposal”; “in Japan, people are . . . expected to understand what this sort of behavior signals”). One general norm can be stated as follows:

- (35) it is good if I know what another person wants
 this person doesn’t have to say this to me
 this person can do something else

EXPRESSION OF ONE’S THOUGHTS: ATTITUDES TO DISCUSSION AND DISSENT

As mentioned earlier, in Anglo culture it is generally taken for granted that opinions can be freely expressed, that it is good to express one’s opinions, and that one doesn’t have to agree with other people. Roughly:

- (36) everyone can say something like this:
 “I think this, I don’t think this”
- (37) it is good to say what I think
- (38) when someone says something like this:
 “I think this”
 I don’t have to say something like this:
 “I think the same”

This does not mean that Anglo culture values confrontation and, so to speak, “fighting for the sake of fighting.” On the contrary, seen from the perspective of, say, Polish culture (Wierzbicka 1991a, *in pressb*), Jewish culture (Schiffrin 1984), or American black culture (Kochman 1981; Wierzbicka 1994b), mainstream Anglo culture appears to avoid confrontation, and to encourage a search for common ground, as well as free expression of one’s thoughts and free voicing of dissent.

Seen from a Japanese point of view, however, Anglo attitudes to discussion and dissent often seem to be highly confrontational and aggressive. For example, Kume writes:

Japanese attitudes toward group discussion seem to be sharply different from North American attitudes. The North American idea of majority rule or split decision does not function effectively in the Japanese setting. Such decision style is what the Japanese attempt to avoid by all means . . . their meetings do not degenerate into adversary proceedings in which participants either strive for supremacy or accept less meaningful generalizations as their only common ground. [1985:233]

The use of the word *degenerate* leaves no doubt as to the Japanese writer's attitude to Anglo-American norms of conducting meetings. The Japanese way is a different way—as illustrated in the following story (“Staff Meeting”) from Kataoka's book:

Alan, a business intern at a Japanese company, was looking forward to attending his first staff meeting. Since the agenda included an issue that would be controversial in an American office, Alan expected to encounter an interesting discussion.

The meeting, however, ended up being pretty dull: there were no pro and con arguments. Instead, people asked a few questions about the issue and some made brief comments in favor of one proposed solution. Alan had heard that some of the staff disagreed with this proposed solution but they merely raised a few minor questions. One committee member did state his objection; there was a moment of silence, and no one responded. Then the chairperson asked if there were any other questions or comments and brought the issue to a close. He didn't even call for a vote. In the end, Alan thought, they hadn't discussed anything substantial at all. [1991:17]

This time, Kataoka asks, “Why do you think the staff members were relatively quiet at the meeting and voiced little dissent?” and answers, “They had decided to avoid open confrontation in this instance, or probably they knew that the issue had been settled beforehand.” This is accompanied by the following commentary:

Although company staff meetings in Japan can include lively discussion, group involvement in projects typically requires lots of consensus-building before formal decisions are made. One is expected to figure out that a “pointless question” or silence means reservations or disagreement. Sometimes a lone dissenter is ignored because he or she has not made the effort to get constructive criticism from workmates before formal statements are made; group approval is often secured by more informal manoeuvring prior to the meeting. This process is called *nemawashi*, an important skill in Japanese society. [1991:75]

This story illustrates the Japanese cultural value of something like “consensus” and “group merger” (see De Vos 1985:170): when a group of people are to do something together (“like one person”), it is important for them to behave, and, if possible, “feel” as if they really all thought the same and wanted the same. For this

reason, a majority decision is usually felt to be an unsatisfactory basis for common action, and a vote is avoided. The prevailing cultural model does not require that a minority view should be subordinated to the view of the majority, or that the minority view should be silenced, but rather that after long informal consultations a modified view should emerge with which everyone in the group could identify.

The following cultural script can represent the cultural model in question:

- (39) when many people want to do something like one person ["together"]
 it is good if one of them can say something like this:
 "everyone [here] thinks the same"
 "everyone [here] wants the same"
 it is good if all these people can think this
 it is not good if some of these people says something like this:
 "I don't think the same"
 "I don't want the same"

The concomitant strategy of *nemawashi* (root binding), which means, according to Kume, "preparatory communication or laying the ground-work through informal discussion and consultation before the formal proposal is presented to the official meeting" (1985:232), can be represented as follows:

- (40) *Nemawashi*:
 when many people want to do something together ("like one person")
 it is good if these people can say things to one another for a long time
 after this someone can say something like this:
 "everyone here wants the same"
 "everyone here thinks the same"

The value placed on unanimity in a group can be seen as closely related to the value placed on "saying the same" in any interpersonal encounter, as evidenced in the ubiquity of the particle *ne* in Japanese speech. As I have argued elsewhere (Wierzbicka 1994b; see also Cook 1990), *ne* means "I think you would say the same." Its high frequency in Japanese speech highlights the importance of the following scripts:

- (41) when someone says something to me
 it is good to say (often) something like this:
 "I would say the same"⁷
- (42) when I say something to someone
 it is good to say (often) something like this:

"I think you would say the same"

These scripts, which highlight the importance of "saying the same," are closely related to scripts discouraging "dissent," "disagreement," and "disunity," such as the following:

- (43) when someone says something to me
 I can't say something like this to this person:
 "I wouldn't say the same"
 "I don't think the same"

When discussing in English the family of cultural rules to which the rules portrayed in this section belong, writers often use pejorative words such as *conformism* or the neutral but not entirely appropriate *consensus*. For example, Honna and Hoffer write, "Conformism fosters a great sense of oneness shared by all the members of the same group. . . . A member who deviates from the group norms or disturbs the group consensus may have to take the risk of being excluded from the group" (1989:122).

Clearly, the use of terms such as *conformism* (and even *consensus*) reflects an Anglo culture perspective, not a Japanese one. From a Japanese point of view, what is really involved is not "conformism" but *wa*—a concept that has no equivalent in English but that can be explained to speakers of English, as to any other cultural outsiders, in terms of universal human concepts (see Wierzbicka 1991b). The use of such concepts allows us to avoid ethnocentric bias and to present both the concept of *wa* and the concomitant cultural rules from a more neutral, cultural-independent point of view.

CONCLUSION

Cross-linguistic investigations suggest that all human beings assume the same (presumably innate) model of a human person, defined by a small set of universal predicates, which includes the following elements (lexicalized, in all probability, in all languages of the world): think, know, want, feel, say, see, hear, do, and live (see Goddard and Wierzbicka, eds. 1994; Wierzbicka 1992, in press b; see also Bruner 1990)

But beyond this rudimentary universal model, cultures differ enormously in their assumptions, expectations, and norms concerning human psychology and social interaction. One way of approaching these differing assumptions, expectations, and norms

is to think of them as unconscious "cultural rules": rules for thinking, rules for feeling, rules for speaking, rules for doing things.

To allow for cross-cultural comparisons and to be free of ethnocentric bias, rules of this kind have to be portrayed in terms of universal human concepts, not in terms of culture-specific concepts such as self-effacement, modesty, self-assertion, humility, conformity, and so on, which are themselves loaded with cultural assumptions.

Every culture has its own ways of speaking, closely related to the culturally endorsed ways of thinking and of behaving. For example, the Anglo rules of communication discussed in this article are closely related to such general rules of Anglo (especially Anglo-American) social psychology as the rules of "positive thinking," "self-enhancement," "autonomy," or "feel good" rules (see, e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Hochschild 1983; Kitayama and Markus 1992; see also Wierzbicka 1994a) such as the following ones:

(44) it is good to think very good things about oneself

(45) it is good to feel good all the time

(46) it is good to think something like this:

"when I do something, I do it because I want to do it
not because someone else wants it"

On the other hand, the Japanese cultural rules discussed in this article are clearly related to such basic and much-discussed rules of Japanese social psychology as the need to always pay attention to and anticipate other people's unexpressed feelings (especially bad feelings) (see, e.g., Lebra 1976) or the value of "group identification" (see, e.g., De Vos 1985):

(47) it is good to often think about what other people may feel

it is good to often think something like this:

"all these people are like one person
all these people want the same
I am one of these people
this is good"

Psychological rules of this kind manifest themselves with particular clarity in a culture's "ethnography of speaking" (see Hymes 1962)

By analyzing the ways of speaking from a universal, maximally neutral perspective, we can help to reveal the unconscious norms governing other aspects of people's lives—norms which are psychological and social at the same time.

From the perspective explored in this article, "being Japanese" means having internalized a system of cultural rules (rules for thinking, rules for speaking, rules for relating to other people). Rules of this kind are not necessarily unique to a given culture, but the whole system of such rules is. To understand Japanese culture is the same thing as to understand "Japanese psychology." Key Japanese concepts such as *amae* (Doi 1981), *wa*, *enryo* (Wierzbicka 1991b), or *omoiyari* (Travis 1992) provide clues to the understanding of both Japanese culture and Japanese psychology—or, rather, they show how the two cannot really be set apart.

But unique cultural concepts, and more or less unique cultural rules, are not uninterpretable to cultural outsiders, and they do not undermine the "psychic unity of humankind." Universal human concepts, lexicalized in all languages, provide a framework in which cultural concepts and cultural rules can be described, compared, and explained to outsiders; and they help us identify both the universal and the unique aspects of language, culture, and cognition. They enable us "to document genuine differences without turning the other into an incomprehensible alien" (Shweder and Sullivan 1993:517). To quote Shweder, "One hallmark of 'cultural psychology' is the idea that a 'culture' consists of meanings, conceptions and interpretive schemes that are activated or brought 'on-line' through participation in normative social institutions and practices (including linguistic processes)" (1993:417).

Culture-specific "cultural scripts," of the kind explored in this article, belong to the class of such "meanings, conceptions, and interpretive schemes," and I suggest that, alongside the other members of this class they, too, give substance to the idea of cultural psychology.

ANNA WIERZBICKA is professor of linguistics in the Department of Linguistics, Australian National University, Canberra.

NOTES

1. This is not to deny that, as argued forcefully by Pawley (Pawley and Syder 1983), there is much more to a language than a lexicon and a grammar, and that, in particular, every

language is associated with an extensive set of formulaic expressions and phrases essential for successful communication.

2. The full set of hypothesized conceptual primitives, lexicalized in all languages of the world, includes the following elements: [substantives] *I, you, someone, something, people*; [determiners, quantifiers] *this, the same, other, one, two, some, much/many, little/few, all*; [mental predicates] *know, want, think, feel, see, hear*; [speech] *say*; [action, event, movement] *do, happen, move*; [existence, life] *there is, live*; [evaluators] *good, bad*; [descriptors] *big, small*; [space] *where, side, inside, far, near, above, under*; [time] *when, after, before, a long time, a short time*; [taxonomy, partonymy] *kind of, part of*; [intensifier] *very, more*; [similarity] *like*; [clause linkers] *if, if . . . would, because*; [clause operators] *not, maybe*; [metapredicate] *can*. For discussion and justification, see, in particular, Goddard and Wierzbicka, eds. 1994; see also Wierzbicka, in press b.

3. I have chosen Kataoka's book for convenience. The fact that I am using it does not mean that I want to give her book a special prominence at the expense of others.

4. It goes without saying that doing something good for someone else can also make us "feel something good," irrespective of the amount of "trouble" and effort (i.e., "bad feelings") involved in the action itself. (It may feel good to know, or to think, that I am doing something for someone else; from this point of view, the more onerous and troublesome the action the more satisfaction it may give me.)

5. "In these studies subjects performed several anagram tasks (alleged to indicate some important aspect of intelligence). Upon completion of the task subjects were given feedback of their own performance and performance of another subject. . . . In the U.S. . . . , as might be predicted, subjects showed much greater confidence in feedback when the comparison was favorable to the self and expressed considerable suspicion to it when the comparison was unfavorable. In Japan . . . there was an equally strong bias, but in an opposite, self-effacing direction—the respondents immediately accepted the feedback if it was unfavorable to the self, but requested more information if it was favorable to the self" (Kitayama and Markus 1992:15).

6. The phrasing of this component presents difficulties, since neither "together" nor "with" are universal human concepts. In many concepts, "together" can be successfully replaced by the phrase "like one person," but since "and" is not a universal concept either, a phrase such as "you and I did something like one person" also creates problems. The matter requires further investigation.

7. Strictly speaking, the component "I would say the same" is elliptical; a more complete version would read, "If I wanted to say something about this, I would say the same."

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