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.

J. Shaules, *Language, Culture, and the Embodied Mind*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-0587-4_1

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.