

## Review of Anna Wierzbicka's "Semantics, Culture & Cognition Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations"

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### Abstract

The under view article is a venture to pin down the key features of Anna Wierzbicka's book bringing to light the chief traits of her inscriptional fashion, diction and handling of the structures bearing in mind her mechanics as a linguistic-author. The prime intent of this shot is to have an improved conception of the underlying thoughts and intentions for which the book is written. Through lexemes of diverse lingo she put forwards distinctive conceptual cosmos. It can be a handy tool for researchers and students of linguistics. This concise review of the book is accomplished from broad-spectrum area of expertise to structural and methodological analysis in conjunction with inclusive epitome and few remarks about the writer.

### Details of the Book

The book under review is 'Semantics, Culture, and Cognition Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations' and it is written by a Polish linguistics Anna Wierzbicka. The book is published by Oxford University Press, New York in 1992. It consists of six published and some other essays by Anna Wierzbicka. It is divided into twelve chapters. It has 487 pages including postscript, notes, references and index.

### About the Author:

Anna Wierzbicka a polish linguistic, author of the book under review, is renowned worldwide for her NSM theory which she proposed in her book 'Semantic Primitives, in 1972. NSM (*Natural Semantic Meta-language*) is presently regarded as one of the leading global theories as for as language and meanings are concerned. She was born in Warsaw on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1938. She was brought up in Poland and graduated from Warsaw University. She did her Ph.D. from Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences in 1964 and then migrated to Australia in 1972. At present she is working at the Australian National University in Canberra as a professor of linguistics.

She wrote over 20 books and numbers of books reviewed or edited are even higher. She is a multi-discipline and prolific author and chief areas of her interest include linguistics, philosophy, religion, cognition, psychology, cultural studies, discourse, pragmatics and anthropology. She has published number of research articles in prominent international journals on diverse disciplines. Her work is translated in many languages of the world.

Professionally she is a research Fellow at world distinguished institutes i.e. Australian Academy of the Humanities; the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, she holds two Honorary Doctorates, one from Marie Curie-Sklodowska University, Poland in 2004 and the other from Warsaw University, Poland in 2006. She won Dobrushin Prize in 2010 and Polish Science Foundation's prize in 2010 for the social sciences and humanities.

### Epitome of the Book:

Language is a vehicle for expression in term of meanings which are autonomous from lexical boundaries and are transferable across languages, though there is a striking semantic difference between them. The book initiates with the concept of soul, mind and heart for which we have Russian expressions '*Dusa, dme, serdce*' based on variety and need of natural semantic meta-language. Man is incapable to act and behave the way he relishes since he is naturally dictated by the forces beyond his domain i.e. fate, destiny or doom. For such universal phenomena expressionistic phrases may vary but with identical conceptual considerations. In English we articulate it as fate, in Russian as '*Rok*', in Polish '*los*', in Roman '*fortuna*' or '*fatum*', in Italian '*destino*', in French '*destin*' and likewise in German '*schicksal*'. The difference relies heavily on history, cultural and social norms where they acquire concrete shape and obtain national traits. So idea of fate is cultural rather than global dependent phenomena.

If deep-seated emotions such as interest, surprise, joy, anger disgust and fear are universal then why lexical expressions are dissimilar across languages e.g. Polish doesn't have the precise word for disgust, and Gidjingali language unable to discern fear from shame. We are not in a position to assert that English lexemes disgust, shame or fear are basic psychological realities, yet such linguistics attributes hold as objective, natural kinds and culture-free. Emotions are natural, intrinsic & widespread but communicative terms may diverse and are cultural dependent. Similarly, moral and ethical norms uttered through natural language are also culture cum langue specific. Lexis such as justice and courage are language specific; pride in English,

*superbia* in Latin, *orgueil* in French and *pycha* in Polish likewise Roman *Pietas* and *Piety*, Greek concept of '*apatheia*' & *apathy* Russian word *smirenje* Christian ideal of 'humility'. Perceptions and notions are accessible through concrete rather than abstract language.

Coward being a noun designates categorization rather than sheer property. It too has negative association and feelings. Courageous on the contrary is an adjective and doesn't specify a person as the way coward does. Brave focal points on conduct which as a 'in the heart' bias; fearless has quite opposite involvement as comparison to previously mentioned terminology. Reckless is similar to bold though other languages differ significantly as Polish word have a exact semantic equivalent as coward. For terms such as 'brave', 'courageous', or 'bold' Polish has subsequent lexical terminology *Odwazny*, *Smiaty*, *Dzielny*, *Mgzny* and *Waleczny*.

In almost all the languages personal names and expressive derivation seated deep i.e. in English we note first name, full name, family name and nick name with either formally; informality, masculine; feminine or child like implications in term of regional dialects, individual histories-frequencies-associations and proper names semantics. This semantics system incorporates sub-system like kin terms fashion in family life i.e. Mummy and Daddy which are termed as terms of address. This derivation is not restricted to English only Russian and Polish instances mentioned authenticate the fact.

It is a fantasy to deem that labels such as 'distance', 'familiarity', 'respect', or 'married status' have invariable denotations within a specified language. At first sight one might be persuaded to consign the identical features to English titles such as Mr., Mrs. and Miss and to French titles such as Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle. But they are not alike in French one can talk to a man as Monsieur, without a surname, but in English one cannot address a man as Mister. Take into account the analogous Polish forms *pan*, *pani*, and *panna* which match up more intimately to the French forms Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle than to the English forms Mr., Mrs., and Miss. 'Pragmatic' sense interrelated to the speaker's mind-set can be illustrated with the same exactness as Semantic meta-language.

Language as an echo of national culture and character; it is also part of culture though not apparent which domain of given culture is reflected; which is connected as living beings. National character is fashioned by nation's history so external and interchangeable. For instance, events occurred in a culture has portraying images nationally as well as internationally. Truth is an essential moral ideal in western culture although most of languages don't have words for such trend. We discern emotionality, tendency to passivity and fatalism, anti-rationalism, moral Passion, diminutive adjectives, personal names and infinitive constructions are compared with Polish and English in the last session of the book.

### **Description of Objectives:**

Anna Wierzbicka, by virtue of six published and some other essays in the book under review enlarged our comprehension about diverse relations amid distinctive forms of languages, cultural and psychological connotations. This book is a valiant shot to amalgamate social values, philosophical considerations, literary outlooks, linguistic perspectives and ethno- linguistics theories. The prime objective of this book is to have intellectual capacity of both present and past paradigm through language reflection instead of to bring about label against the tide of times gone by. At the advent of 20<sup>th</sup> century some of the Russian linguistics terms and attitudes cited in detail in this book endure a transformation and sooner or later these are expected to make their ways in language expression.

Language has both synchronic and diachronic indication towards time. Lexical items replicate and outline nation existing approaches. Nation maxims, grammar and linguistics phrases, though inevitable, don't alter overnight. Polish expressive notions and linguistics connotations are also experiencing a modification. Conventional slogan i.e. *God*, *honor* and *motherland* are a substance of past. After autonomy and economic realization notions of honor and 'risk-taking courage' become obsolete. The concept of '*volja*' in Russian means absolute liberty felt a decline too in the current century. Time alters and the language and notions too.

### **Methodology of the Book:**

In the said book Anna Wierzbicka implements two folds methodologies. Firstly, contextual analysis of the linguistics units i.e. words, phrases, clauses, syntactic structures and a few imperative constructions. And for this purpose she has exercised actual language properties e.g. Russian and Polish. Furthermore, book abounds with references from other languages i.e. French, English, Japanese to a great extent and Italian, German and Eskimo to a less extent. Secondly, she exemplifies linguistics meanings in such a manner as if they are universal and which she crafts as syllogisms i.e. if, this, that & then properties and other diagrammatic expressions from classical logic.

In the said book readers and analysts can find empirical multilingual affluence that is not theoretical but actually philosophical in archaic but in dynamic shape and form. Along with general linguistics philosophical considerations are notable in the course of the book. Socio-philosophical cum anthropological concepts and

strategies have dynamically been dealt in by Anna Wierzbicka ranging from ancestral reference Radcliffe Brown to present-day figure Michelle Rosaldo.

### **Structure of the Book:**

The structure compositions followed by Anna in this book is bits of fairly intricate English syntax i.e. relative and complements clauses. To fabric the elucidations in shorter and easier mode she is engaged in complex constructions. Culture specific sentiments in term of scriptural mechanism are interconnected in a casual sequence. In the said book there is an amalgam of positive expressions such as 'I think this is good' and negative axioms such as 'I think this is bad'. These evaluative requisites characterize society and semantics arguments not individual. She has utilized these accounts not as a cord to NSM based semantics primitives but for readability.

Russian words all over the book are decoded in term of *Slavic and East European Journal*. *Pitantjatjara* are spelt out in context with its native orthography. Other lexical items i.e. Polish, German, Italian, French and Roman are articulated in their own common way. To her, in Australian English morphology there is no emergence of suffixes –z and –za likewise the Russian '*blagorodnyj*' doesn't found recurrent appearance.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion the book is logically and structurally able-bodied. To aptly accomplish her objectives she has employed managerial and organizational devices in a befitting manner. The author has presented his notions in an objective, credible and persuasive manner. Her mode of presentation is structurally exclusive, logically sound, lexically influential and conceptually consistent. It's a research book and author methodology of dealing the subject matter is apposite, sound and suitable. By virtue of aptly managed diction she has made a mark to her target readers. The book is a prime addition in its respective meadow of study. It can be put into comparison with any scholarly book in the relevant genre. Through above referred merits of the book it has a lasting impact on common and analytical circle alike.

### **References**

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