Metalanguage for enabling immigrants and refugees: Relevance of *Natural Semantic Metalanguage* and *Minimal English*

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Abstract

We should seek every possible method for educating immigrants and refugees and facilitating communication for them—especially during the current difficult times due to the spread of a killer-pandemic (i.e., Covid-19). To this end, I discuss the role which "metalanguage" could play in this regard, with reference to Natural Semantic Metalanguage/NSM and Minimal English/ME (e.g., Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2018). This mainly theoretical contribution will demonstrate how NSM and ME can be powerful pedagogical tools for ethnopragmatic instruction and a mitigator to cross-cultural misunderstanding in intercultural/international communication. The main merit which I claim is raising awareness about the significance of this well-established project in applied linguistics and demonstrating how it can tie in with the immigrant-and-refugee situation.

Keywords: Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM); Minimal English (ME); cultural scripts; immigrants; refugees; cross-cultural education; intercultural communication

Introduction and Background

This contribution is harmonious with the ever-increasing interest in meeting migrants/immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers' language and communication needs in the host communities (e.g., Hill, 2020; Krumm & Plutzar, 2008; Mallows, 2012; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020; UNESCO Bangkok, 2020). This is also in line with the so-called "multilingual turn" (e.g., May, 2015), which emphasises that those learning a language are becoming "bi-/multilinguals" themselves or in progress to this status; and this is especially true for the situation of migrants/immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers. The aim

of this contributions is to raise awareness about and demonstrate the usefulness of "metalanguage" in this context while shining light on a well-grounded project in applied linguistics. This is the so-called NSM and ME. The debated points have been previously addressed by the pioneer contributors in this area with regard to language learning and intercultural communication (e.g., Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007). In the present paper, the usefulness of NSM and ME will be discussed and illustrated, showing their relevance to the immigrant-and-refugee situation. (From now on, I will refer to "immigrants" and "refugees" in particular; read below for the reason behind that).

As for defining "metalanguage," it is the analysis of the language used to talk about objects in the world; in other words, it is "language about another language" (Britannica, 1998). In this paper, I will debate the relevance of "metalanguage" to the situation of immigrants and refugees (henceforth I & Rs). The inevitable question that arises is why I & Rs in particular? In fact, many reasons stand out. First, I & Rs are obliged to deal with the host language/culture in real time and often without prior preparation, unlike the case of second/foreign language learners. Second, the time factor oftentimes plays against them and, thus, educational programmes addressed to I & Rs should take this into consideration. Third, the inability to cope with the new *linguaculture* (the language and its cultural dimension, Risager, 2015) could have adverse effects on I & Rs such as the failure to integrate into the target community or build a stable professional life there (e.g., Barker, 2018). Added to this is the rhetoric of some extreme far-right politicians who adopt an open hostile policy towards foreigners, especially in the European context (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008).

From the above, it comes as no surprise that language issues are positioned at the heart of the I & Rs' education, given that language is so tied to identity, migration process, and "psycho-social well-being"; moreover, linguistic diversity stands as a major challenge to educators (UNESCO Bangkok, 2020). Mastering the target community's language can obviously bring many benefits to I & Rs, ranging from "social acceptance, economic security and cultural understanding" (for adults) to being "the key to social and academic success at school" (for children) (Mallows, 2012, p. 3). However, it should be noted that integration requires, in addition to language education, active participation in the politics, society, economy, and culture of the host country (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008).

I am fully aware of the diverse characteristics of these two groups (i.e., immigrants and refugees), in addition to others like "asylum seekers" and "migrants." Based on the definitions by the International Rescue Committee (2018), I have prepared a recapitulative table (Table 1). Herein, I divided the four groups into two categories based on the willingness (or lack thereof) to leave one's country (examples in category1 are my own). Note that throughout this paper I will refer to "immigrants" and "refugees" (representative of the two categories) as if they are one homogeneous group for the sake of illustration only.

I will move on to discuss the theoretical framework: what is NSM and ME and what they are useful for? I will then explain and illustrate how NSM can be a powerful pedagogical tool for "ethnopragmatic" instruction. After that, I will debate how NSM can be an auxiliary language and when extended into ME, which is translatable to any world language, it can be readily employed in intercultural settings as a *lingua franca* (the chosen communicative medium used among those who do not share a common language, Seidlhofer, 2011). The discussion section will consolidate the issues raised in the paper and reflect on areas of conceptualization, practice, and research.

What are NSM and ME?

NSM consists of a set of approximately sixty-five words (and word-like lexical constructions) that makes up a universal cross-linguistic semantic repertoire (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007) (see Table 2). Each of the items in Table 2 is a semantic prime. These semantic primes allow explicating language-specific

Table 1 *"Immigrant," "Migrant," "Refugee," & "Asylum Seeker": Defining Characteristics*

Category 1: Willingly		Category 2: Against One's Will	
Immigrant	**Migrant**	**Refugee**	**Asylum seeker**
Someone who leaves their country willingly to settle in another country, e.g., to seek a secured job. After a long and complicated legal process, they can become permanent residents and then gain citizenship – but remain free to return home.	Someone who willingly decides to leave to a foreign country (or within their own country), usually motivated by the quest for better job/study opportunities.	Someone who is compelled to leave their country because of fear of, e.g., war, prosecution, violence. They cannot be back home if the situation does not improve.	Someone who flees their country seeking international protection; their application for a refugee status is still being processed. Not every asylum seeker eventually acquires a "refugee" status.
Someone from Somalia who immigrates to a Scandinavian country to seek better opportunities. They get residence; then apply for citizenship.	Someone from a Maghreb country traveling to Italy or Spain for a seasonal work.	Syrians in Lebanon who fled their homeland due to the civil war.	Someone from a central American country who heads to the USA (e.g., because of violence in their countries) are asylum seekers, even if they make it to this country "illegally."

Table 2 *Semantic Primes, English Exponents (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014, p. 12; Goddard, 2018, pp. 12–15)*

Substantive	I~Me, You, Someone, People, Something~Thing, Body
Relational substantive	Kind, Part~Have Parts
Determiners	This, The Same, Other~Else
Quantifiers	One, Two, Some, All, Many~Much, Little~Few
Evaluators	Good, Bad
Descriptors	Big, Small
Mental predicates	Think, Know, Want, Don't want, Feel, See, Hear
Speech	Say, Words, True
Actions, events, movement	Do, Happen, Move
Location, existence, specification	Be (Somewhere), There is, Be (Someone/Something)
Possession	(Is) Mine
Life and death	Live, Die
Time	Time~When, Now, Before, After, A Long Time, A Short Time, For Some Time, Moment
Space	Place~Where, Here, Above, Below, Far, Near, Side, Inside, Touch
Logical concepts	Not, Maybe, Can, Because, If
Intensifier, augmentor	Very, More
Similarity	Like~as/Way

Note: "Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes). Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes. They can be formally complex. They can have combinatorial variants (allolexes indicated by ~). Each prime has well specified syntactic (combinatorial properties)." (Goddard, 2009, p. 107).

words and formulating *cultural scripts* that help elucidate the communicative norms and "unpack" the nuances of cultural meaning in a comprehensible way to both members of a given cultural and foreigners alike (Goddard, 2009). NSM plays a decisive role where the translation of culturally-rooted terms and concepts across languages/cultures appears to fail. Moreover, the employment of such a metalanguage as an explanatory framework in cross-cultural studies challenges the ethnocentrism residing in the deployment of terms and expressions like *polite*, *impolite*, *high-context cultures*, *low-context cultures*, *power*, *distance*, *involvement* in depicting cultural practices, because they are not by any means culture-neutral (Goddard, 2004; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007). The striking advantage of this "core vocabulary" of semantic primes, which has its own strictly defined grammar, is that it makes possible the phrasing of cultural scripts that serve in explicating words, concepts, communicative practices, and behaviours of a given culture in a culture-neutral manner (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007).

It should be noted that some of the semantic primes might have variants and portmanteau words, which are also considered part of MSM, like *a lot* (variant of *much~many*), *well* (variant of *good*), *such* (variant of *like*), *it* (variant of *this thing*), and *both* and *very* (portmanteau words based on *all*) (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015).

To illustrate, Script 1 and 2 portray the ideal of avoiding direct requests and opting for interrogative requests respectively in the Anglo-English culture (culture of L1-English countries, especially UK and USA). As one of the linguists noted, these scripts might be easy to read but are way more difficult to write (Allan, as cited in Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004).

> **Script 1**
> Many people think like this:
> at many times when I want someone to do something, it is not good if I say something like this:
> "I want you to do something, I think that you will do it because of this".
> If I say this, this someone can feel something bad because of it.
>
> (Goddard, 2009, p. 109)

> **Script 2**
> Many people think like this:
> at many times when I want someone to do something, it can be good if I say something like this:
> "It can be good if you do this. It can be good if you think about it".
>
> (Goddard, 2009, p. 109)

The inclination to have a language that is easy to learn, non-Anglocentric, culture-neutral, and able to facilitate communication at the international level has urged NSM scholars to extend their "mini-English" into a "minimal English." In more recent works, Goddard and Wierzbicka (2015) have further elaborated on the vocabulary of NSM. NSM researchers have had to make concessions and include other vocabulary items to make communication possible via this metalanguage. In this regard, in addition to the list of the semantic primes (see Table 2), they have supplied universal and widespread "semantic molecules" and other useful words. These lexical items make up a 400-word repertoire. According to the researchers, the ME project "provides informed guidelines, based on linguistic research, about how to say important things in a clear and translatable way" (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015, p. 2).

As for semantic molecules, they refer to words that might be semantically complex but seem to be universal or near-universal as they contribute to explicating other more complex words. Semantic molecules include many semantically diverse categories: body-part (e.g., hand, mouth, eyes, head,

skin, blood), biosocial (e.g., be born, children, men, women, mother, wife), physical (a thing, long, hard, soft, sharp, heavy, middle, around), environmental (sun, sky, ground, fire, water, day, night, light), biological (e.g., a creature, bird, fish, tree, grow, egg), everyday activities (eat, drink, sit, lie), other actions and activities (hold, make, kill, play, laugh, sing, dance), naming (be called), and manner (quickly, slowly).

There is another list of semantic molecules that groups an additional 100 or so prevalent words across the world's languages. Though some of them are culture-specific and may or may not belong to the language of the modern era, they are highly valued vocabulary items as their meanings constitute part of many other concepts. Moreover, they (or their near-equivalents) can be semantic molecules in other languages. This group is sub-categorised as follows: environmental (rain, wind, sea, sand, hot, cold), biological (e.g., dog, cat, horse, sheep, seeds, grass), times (year, day, month, week, clock), social places (house, building, room, school, hospital, church, bank), places where people live (the Earth, country, city, village), professions (doctor, nurse, teacher, soldier), food and household (e.g., sour, salt, sugar, bread, meat, flour, milk, oil, soup, potatoes, table, bed), materials (e.g., paper, iron, metal, glass, wood, thread, tobacco), transport and technology (car, plane, boat, train, road, wheel, wire, engine, machine, electricity, computer), markings (line, dot), literacy and media (read, write, book), abstract categories (number, colour, music), other words (game, ball; money, buy; God).

The last category encompasses useful words that deserve to have a place in ME because they con-tribute to talking about what is of importance to people all over the world. These words have been selected based on the consensus that they are translatable and do not reflect Anglo and European cultural values. It is worthwhile noting that these words differ in their degree of salience in dif-ferent languages. As an example, words like *stars, moon, east,* and *west* appear to be very wide-spread; meanwhile, the words *plastic*, *environment*, and *photo* might be borrowings or recently adopted in a given language (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015). These words can be grouped as follows: body (brain, heart, breathe, hunger/hungry, dead), environmental (e.g., snow, ice, air, river, mount-ains, desert, island, moon, stars, flood, storm, drought, earthquake, east, west), biological (mosqui-toes, flies, snake), times (hour, second), country (government, capital, border, flag, passport, vote), fields (science, the law, health, education, sport), tools (knife, key, gun, bomb, medicines), materials (gold, rubber, plastic, oil, coal, petrol), technology and sport (pipe, telephone, television, radio, phone, bicycle), literacy and media (photo, newspaper, film).

It is noteworthy that the version of ME used in a particular place can be enriched by local terms. In the Arctic, as an example, it would not theoretically pose a problem to add the word *seal* to the repertoire of ME (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015). Undoubtedly, in Islamic countries, words like *mosque, halal, Imam, Zakat* are likely to be included. It therefore follows that "[d]ifferent practical applications may require different concessions, which means that minimal English is not cast in iron" (Marini, 2017a, para 10).

NSM and ME for Enabling I & Rs' Education in Host Communities

The application of cultural scripts as a tool in cross-cultural education is currently discussed. Goddard (2009) has shown how the cultural scripts methodology, which is used as a research tool in depicting the insider perspective, may be extended and adapted for the purpose of serving as a pedagogical tool relevant to second language learners. Cultural scripts provide a medium of instruction that is "both more tangible, less ethnocentric, and more precise than global labels such as 'directness' or 'polite-ness', or the use of L1 [first language] translation of L2 [second language] lexical items," and which does not confront or contradict intercultural language teaching and the lexical approaches (Goddard, 2004, p. 150, 60). It is emphasised that this medium of ethnopragmatic instruction needs to be applied

by language educators to prove its merits (Goddard, 2004). Indeed, where else can this approach be applied better than in educating I & Rs about the host culture's keywords, sociopragmatics norms, (conversational) practices, and so on?

At least four adjustments of the cultural scripts are needed (Goddard, 2009). First, the immigrant-and-refugee's host culture can be mentioned explicitly at the beginning of the corresponding cultural script. This might be a trivial change, but it, in fact, marks a transition from the insider to the outsider perspective. Second, a directive mode can be opted for—that is, "you" might be used in lieu of "I." Third, it is recommended that the metalanguage be adjusted at the level of pronominal reference; instead of the slightly awkward (but universal) "this someone" (non-universal), "he/she" can be employed for the purpose of shifting learners' attention to the message of the script. Fourth, differences from the home culture(s) can be highlighted by means of contrastive content. Script 3 is adapted according to the first three guidelines (Italicised information):

> **Script 3**
> A pedagogical script on how to make requests in English [the host culture]
> *In America, Britain, or Australia*, when you want someone to do something for you,
> at many times *you can't* say something like this to *him/her*:
> "I want you to do something good for me. I think that you will do it because of this".
> If you say something like this to someone, *he/she* can feel something bad.
> <div align="right">(Goddard, 2009, p. 115)</div>

Wierzbicka (as cited in Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007) believes that the avoidance of direct requests should be the topic of the first acculturation lesson for immigrants in an English-speaking country. Script 4 illustrates the four adjustments cited earlier highlighting the differences from the mother culture.

> **Script 4**
> A pedagogical script on how to make requests in English [the host culture] with contrastive information.
> *In America, Britain, or Australia*, when you want someone to do something good for you, at many times it will be good if you say something like this to him/her:
> "I want you to do something good for me."
> Maybe after I say this you will do it, maybe you will not do it, I don't know.
> You say it like this if you know him/her well, or you say it like this if you don't know him/her well
> You say it like this if he/she is someone below you, or you say it like this if he/she is someone above you
> <div align="right">(Goddard, 2009, p. 115)</div>

In what follows, I would like to suggest another sort of scripts. This one I call a "*pluri*cultural script." It is a script that brings together two or more scripts from the host culture and the home one(s) vis-à-vis one pragmatic aspect. As an example, Script 5 juxtaposes the ideal of avoiding direct requests (e.g., pass me the salt, please!) in the Anglo-English culture (adapted from Goddard, 2009, p. 109), their profuse use in Arab culture (revised from Dendenne, 2017, p. 10), and the questioning of the addressee's ability to comply with the request in Singaporean English (adapted from Wong, 2004, p. 239); the Anglo-English is the host culture and Arabic and Singaporean English are the home cultures here.

> **Script 5**
> A pedagogical script for the avoidance of direct requests in the host culture (Britain)
> and opting for them in two home cultures (Arab countries and Singapore).

In Britain, many people think like this:
　　at many times when *you* want someone to do something, it is not good if *you* say
　　something like this to *him/her*:
　　 "I want you to do something, I think that you will do it because of this."
　　if *you* say this, *he/she* can feel something bad because of it.
In Arab countries, people think like this:
　　when *you* say to someone: "I want you to do something good for me",
　　it is good if *you* say to *him/her* to do this
　　 if *you* say it like this, *he/she* will not think like this:
　　"I am someone below him/her"
　　when *you* say it like this, you don't think at the same time:
　　 "I am someone above him/her"
In Singapore, people think like this:
　　when *you* say to someone about something "I want you to do it"
　　you can think about it like this:
　　if *he/she* can do it, *he/she* will do it

For the sake of the same objective, a cultural script that represents a home/host value can be given and I & Rs are asked to rewrite/reflect on it from the host/home culture's perspective. If this value does not exist in the one culture, the nearest value will be addressed instead. Even if such a value does not exist at all, it should not be a problem. When I & Rs are made aware of such facts, it is an advantage as well. Script 6 is a portrayal of the Malay notion of *saber* (literally, patient, forbearing) wherein Malaysia is the host country and Britain is the country of origin.

　Script 6
　A pedagogical script of saber in Malay (host culture) and in Britain (home culture)
　In Malaysia, *you* are *sabar* [at this time] =
　　at this time, *you* felt something bad
　　because of this, *you* could have thought like this:
　　I don't want this
　　I want to do something now
　　you did not think like this, because *you* didn't want to think like this
　　it is good if *you* can be like this
　　(adapted from Goddard, 2004, p. 157)
　In Britain, you are patient [at this time] =
　……………………………………………..

A word of caution needs to be added. Supplying I & Rs with the cultural scripts representing the host and home sociolinguistic rules and the culturally construed behaviour needs not be perceived as a uni-directional and passive process. This type of ethnopragmatic instruction provides I & Rs with ample opportunity to reflect, comment, criticize the content of the cultural scripts under study as well as talk about their own communication experiences at home and abroad.

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that the cultural scripts approach has already been put to the test in English as a second/foreign language (L2) instructional contexts and it has proven effective at developing learners' interactional awareness and competence to a large extent (e.g., Baranovskaja & Skorupa, 2011; Lebbal & Atamna, 2018; Lenchuk & Ahmed, 2019; Sadow, 2018). And it has also been proven effective in cross-cultural comparison of various speech acts (e.g., offers, compliments, requests) and conversation routines (e.g., disagreeing with/deflecting compliments) between pairs of cultures (e.g., Dendenne, 2017; Karimnia & Afghari, 2010;

Karimnia, 2012; Shaban, Malmi & Salehizadeh, 2019; Wierzbicka, 2010), where input from such studies has direct implication in L2 and I & Rs' instruction.

The following section sketches a sample lesson plan, suggested by the author, for teaching I & Rs one of the sociopragmatic conventions of the host culture.

A sample lesson plan

The devised ready-to-use lesson plan is based on the cultural scripts approach. Through this form of ethnopragmatic instruction, I & Rs (and also learners of English in L2 contexts) will learn the restrictions the target language/culture (British English) poses on the use of direct requests. Teachers should not hesitate to make the adaptations deemed necessary for their situation and teaching needs as regards the content of the lesson, the planning, the timing, and so forth. The mentioned countries and people (here and throughout the paper) are selected to reflect the reality of immigration/migration without any attention to associate stigma or stereotypes, especially with the I & Rs' countries and their people. In this lesson plan, I have invested in the already existing literature on requests (e.g., Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis & Woodfield, 2012), teaching/learning L2 pragmatics (e.g., Cohen, 2005; LoCastro, 2012; Roever, 2022), and cultural-scripts-based instruction (e.g., Sadow, 2018). For the sake of illustration, the I & Rs who constitute the audience of this lesson are assumed to have come from the same L1 background. However, in reality, it is not taken for granted that educators are confronted by a homogeneous group of I & Rs.

The lesson plan's header

Topic: Making requests
Lesson 1: Avoidance of direct requests
Host linguaculture: British English (BrEng)
Audience: I & Rs from Afghanistan/Ethiopia/Syria
Level: Multi-level
Teacher: Native speaker of BrEng
Time allotted: 120 minutes
Objectives: Learners will:

1. Be aware of the avoidance of direct requests in BrEng.
2. Be able to produce modified requests by means of appropriate linguistic mitigators.
3. Compare/contrast the home and host sociocultural norms as regards the use/non-use of direct requests.

Phase 1: Warming up

The Teacher (T) may start by asking the learners (LLs) questions related to the speech act of requesting and the variables influencing the performance of this act with reference to both the host and home cultures. Some of the following questions may be raised:

a. How would you request a friend to help you in doing something like holding the groceries?
b. If the same request were addressed to a stranger/a person older than you, would it be different?
c. Have you ever noticed how a native speaker (NS) would request such a favour?
d. Have you ever asked someone here (in Britain/England) for something and he/she felt offended? If yes, what could be the reason?

Another possible way of introducing the lesson is to show LLs a video (naturally occurring situation/ scene from a film). Then, the T incites a discussion on the level of directness of the request, mitigating devices employed, and the relationship between interlocutors (e.g., close, distant, workmates, boss-employee), what is requested (e.g., minor help, money, information), gender of the interactants (e.g., from man to woman or vice versa), and so on. **(20 minutes)**

Phase 2: Presentation of the host community's cultural scripts (CSs)

After the discussion, the T draws the LLs' attention to the fact that, in BrEng, NSs pose restrictions on direct requests because they are perceived as rude. This sociolinguistic rule does not necessarily apply in LLs' home culture. After that, the following cultural script (CS) is presented:

> *In Britain,* many people think like this:
> at many times when I want someone to do something, it is not good if I say
> something like this:
> "I want you to do something, I think that you will do it because of this".
> If I say this, this someone can feel something bad because of it.
> <div align="right">(Goddard, 2009, p. 109) (15 minutes)</div>

If necessary, an L1 version is produced for convenience (e.g., Arabic/Amharic/Pashto or Dari—the last two are the official languages in Afghanistan that are also known as Afghan Persian or Farsi). The T and LLs discuss the content of the script and compare/contrast it with the LLs' home cultures. In the discussion, some of the questions are addressed such as *why it is not effective if I say "I want you to do something"/why someone can feel bad because of this?* A possible answer to this question is that, in Anglo-Saxon countries, people respect each other's freedom of action and freedom from imposition. A direct request to a stranger is perceived as an invasion of the person's territory. This is one of the common traits of an individualistic/egalitarian culture.

The T provides LLs with some of the linguistic devices for mitigating the request coerciveness (the table below) while cautioning that the use of these is context-dependent.

Interrogatives	Suggestive Formulas
Will you … please?	You might like to …
Would you …?	You could consider …
Could you …?	Perhaps you could …
Would you mind …?	I would suggest …
I would like to …?	Have you thought of …?
Won't you …?	(Wierzbicka, as cited in Goddard, 2009, p. 108)
Do you want to …?	
Why don't you …?	
I wonder if…? (Goddard, 2009, p. 108)	

The T needs to draw the LLs' attention to the fact that autonomous learning is inescapable. As ethnographers themselves, LLs may choose a particular pragmatic aspect to learn about (e.g., how to make a request in a formal setting such as in the immigration office). They may also gather information relying on observations, textbooks, or published works and seek opportunities for practising the acquired knowledge (e.g., with NSs, peers, teachers, in chatrooms). Equally important, LLs' reflections on pragmatic conventions of the receiving community are essential (e.g., pragmatic aspects deserving focus, amount of preplanning in face-to-face interactions, Cohen, 2005). **(15 minutes)**

Phase 3: Production

The T asks LLs to remodify the CS given at the beginning of the lesson using their culture's presuppositions. A possible CS from an Arab-speaking learner about a direct request can read as follows:

> *In my country [e.g., Syria]*, people think like this:
> at many times when I want someone to do something good for me,
> it is not bad if I say something like this:
> "I want you to do something good for me",
> *if I say it like this, he/she will not think like this:*
>   *"I am someone below him/her"*
>   *when I say it like this, I don't think at the same time:*
>   *"I am someone above him/her"*   **(20 minutes)**

Then, a discussion is initiated after emphasizing and analyzing the contrastive information in the different scripts written by LLs.

The T can further supply descriptions of real-like situations and ask learners to produce appropriate requests from the NSs' perspective. LLs may have the opportunity to practise with their T or peers. The conclusions drawn from such tasks can be written by means of CSs.

A sample scenario

You are getting out of a supermarket carrying more bags of groceries than you can comfortably hold. On your way to the parking lot where you have left your car, a person (male/female) about your age passes by. You ask him/her to help you carry some bags. What would you say?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

The T assesses the LLs' responses in terms of whether or not they maintain a high degree of imposition while requesting a distant person and what mitigators they choose for modifying the request. Then, the T draws the learners' attention to the fact that an NS is *unlikely* to perform such a highly "face-threatening act." This sociopragmatic constraint can be captured by a CS as follows:

> *In Britain/England*, people think like this:
> At many times when I want someone to do something
> If this is a big thing, it is bad if I say:
> "I want you to do this for me"
>   If I say this, this someone can feel something bad because of this.
>   **(20 minutes)**

Home assignment

The T may ask LLs to observe a situation in the host culture and/or the home culture in which a request is produced and described in terms of the level directness, mitigating devices, the relationship between interlocutors, and so forth. Besides, the T asks LLs to write a CS that portrays the sociolinguistic rule(s) the situation reflects. **(10 minutes)**

T's after-lesson remarks (hypothetical)

1. LLs learners have not only learnt how to avoid uttering direct and culturally ineffective requests but have been made aware of the value of avoiding imposition on others and respecting their autonomy, as key in the British/English society.
2. LLs have reported many situations of pragmatic failure they have experienced themselves in Britain/England (e.g., in the immigration office, supermarket, airport).
3. Most of the LLs were not aware that in BrEng direct requests are not palatable and the sociocultural norms governing their use differ tremendously from their home cultures.
4. This lesson allowed LLs to recognise the differences existing not only between the home and target culture but also between the different home cultures involved (Arab vs. African).
5. LLs enjoyed writing CSs and comparing/contrasting them with their peers, but the task was not that easy for most of them.
6. The fact that some LLs were worried as regards their future in Britain/England has contributed to distracting/attracting their attention during the lesson.
7. The low proficiency level of some LLs or mixed-ability nature of the class made it a challenging task to use English as the medium of instruction or to proceed seamlessly.

Practical considerations

Educators may find the following practical considerations and reflections on NSM/ME-based instruction very insightful:

- When educators are required to deal with heterogeneous groups of immigrants and refugees, it would be more practical to divide them into more homogeneous ones, if possible. It is preferable that such division is based on their L1 and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Arabs, Latinos, Eastern European, Asians), if division by the country of origin may not be deemed practical. Though difficult this might be in reality, further division can be opted for based on individual traits to achieve pedagogical differentiation: linguistic proficiency in L2 (noting that NSM/ME-based instruction does not require advanced levels to be successfully implemented (Karimni, 2012; Sadow, 2018)), level of anxiety/embarrassment, legal situation (e.g., asylum seeker vs. refugee), professional/occupational needs, age (child vs. adult), gender, socio-educational background, physical conditions (e.g., healthy vs. handicapped). This could be the outcome of pre-class interviews/sessions/workshops conducted for the sake of uncovering about the audience and their situation (cf. Sadow, 2018).
- Conducting needs analysis to uncover the I & Rs' traits and needs in a particular context, and how NSM/ME-based instruction could make a contribution is a necessity. The outcomes of this work will be "differentiated curricula" (e.g., Krumm & Plutzar, 2008, p. 13), serving as the base for instruction design and decision-making.
- If the instructor is not a native speaker of the host culture, a native can be invited for insights into the host language/culture and comments on the scripts presented and written by the learners, and for initiating meaningful and eye-opener discussions (cf. Tateyama & Kasper, 2008).
- Displaced learners, at the process of negotiating a new identity, should have a heard voice in NSM/ME-based instruction. They should be taken as "agents" rather than "patients," given that previous research shows that students can provide constructive feedback that would enhance tremendously the efficiency of the instruction (e.g., Sadow, 2018).

This is also in line with the ideal that learning should be centred on "the experience, knowledge and needs of the individual" (Mallows, 2012, p. 4). For example, we listen to the learners with regard to this type of instruction: what they like/do not like? What it seems/does not seem to work well for them? What fits/does not fit their real situations?

- Integrating the NSM/ME-based ethnopragmatic instruction with other tools like TV shows, role plays (Sadow, 2018), film scenes, and storytelling would enhance the efficiency of instruction, given the literature on the fostering potential of such tool in L2 instructed contexts (e.g., Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018; Yue, 2019).

- Presenting many versions of NSM/ME (e.g., English, language(s) of the I & Rs, and the target language) and translating presented cultural scripts (e.g., into one's mother language) should be a foster practice (cf. Dakin, 2012). They are in line with the encouragement of "translanguaging" (fluid use of more than one language in communication/doing tasks) in bi-/multilingual education today (e.g., García & Kleyn, 2015). This is reminiscent of the empirically supported observation that mastering and using L1 tends to enhance the target language learning, and we should not forget that using one's mother language is a human right in the first place (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008).

- Presenting cultural scripts explicating the host community's values, attitudes, cultural keywords, and so on while encouraging commenting, reflecting on them, and comparing them to (near) equivalents in one's own linguaculture is a practice that enhances intercultural communicative awareness and competence. Intercultural communicative competence models stress the need to deal with the culture of the other from one's own perspective and the other way around, while concomitantly suspending the belief that one's way of using language, thinking, and viewing the world are the natural ways (e.g., Byram, 2021).

NSM and ME for Enabling I & Rs' Communication: From Auxiliary Language to a Lingua Franca

NSM can serve as an auxiliary language in intercultural settings and, when extended into ME, plays the role of a fully-functional lingua franca. NSM is a mini-English that can be a "simple and practical lingua franca" (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 73) in international settings. When this is used, I & Rs will no longer be considered linguistically subordinate and disadvantaged by speakers of the host culture's language(s) and other speakers who are superior in terms of linguistic proficiency in intercultural encounters. The semantic primes of NSM can constitute a core-vocabulary (mini-vocabulary, or mini-grammar). This basic vocabulary can be a "survival kit" (McCarthy, 1990, p. 49) for learners, immigrants, and refugees as it practically serves in a wide range of communication situations. The striking advantage of NSM is that it has equivalents in all languages and, therefore, it is accessible to a culture's natives and outsiders alike (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007).

Advocates of NSM claim that the English version of NSM can serve as an auxiliary international language (i.e., nuclear English) rather than a language in its own right. They are aware that activities like negotiating agreements, settling business deals, and managing international solidarity operations in times of disasters by means of *sixty-five or so* words (in whatever language) are realistically impossible. It follows that it is improbable that culture-bound terms used at the international scene such as *negotiations*, *compromise*, *deal*, *deadline*, *probability* are abandoned if an accurate and a quick communication is to be achieved (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007). In other words, this mini-English serves the purpose of "a universal cultural notation for elucidating meanings, ideas, assumptions, and so on" (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 119). Goddard and Wierzbicka (2007) consider the English

version of NSM as a nuclear English that satisfies the prerequisites articulated in Quirk (as cited in Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, pp. 117–118). In this regard, they (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007, p. 118) succinctly explained:

> *NSM English, i.e., the English version of natural semantic metalanguage, is nothing other than such a "nuclear English". It is a subset of "full English", easy to learn, and culture-free as calculus, with no literary, aesthetic or emotional aspirations, and in a very basic sense, communicatively adequate.*

The English version of NSM, when used as an international auxiliary language, enjoys the following assets. First, its simplicity makes it easier and faster to learn than a full-fledged foreign language. Second, it is an intersection where all natural languages meet. Third, its cultural neutrality enables it to function as a useful tool for cross-cultural comparisons and explanations. Fourth, it also serves intercultural training, as I have thoroughly explained earlier (see Section 3) (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2007).

Our need to NSM as an auxiliary language and ME as global lingua franca is justified by the fact that, for Goddard and Wierzbicka (2015), *Global English* entails the use of many untranslatable Anglo terms even into major European languages like *right*, *wrong*, *fairness*, *evidence*. And here where ME is supposed to play a constitutive role; it helps to challenge the Anglocentric bias. The argument is that words in ME have their own equivalents in Minimal Chinese, Minimal Arabic, Minimal Finnish, and so on. As a result, ME can play a substantive role especially in decreasing chances of misunderstanding, compensating meaning loss in translation/interpreting activities, and promote harmonious intercultural communication (especially in written and asynchronous modes). It is important to note that the repertoire of ME is not claimed to be exhaustive since the project is still in progress.

In order to have a concrete example about how ME can be implemented in real situations, the passage below (Script 7) talks about global ethics, an issue on which cross-cultural misunderstanding is highly likely. To this end, the use of ME to talk about global ethics can have significant positive effects. The scripts target the issues of racism and environment protection respectively.

> **Script 7: Global ethics** (Wierzbicka, 2018, p. 120/124, note that item 5 uses only semantic primes)
> **(Charter, item 5, fighting against racism and for conservation)**
> It is very bad if people think like this about some people:
> "People of this kind are not like other people, they are below other people".
> **(Charter, item 8, environment protection)**
> It is good if people think like this about the Earth:
> "There are many people on Earth, they live in many places on Earth.
> If many people do some things in places where they live,
> something very bad can happen to the Earth.
> Because of this, I don't want to do some things in the place where I live."

In a similar vein, in the context of international relations, the misunderstanding between the American administration (during the George W. Bush era), who insistently called on the Chinese regime to act as *a responsible stakeholder*, and their Chinese counterparts could have raised from the lack of agreement on what it means to be *a responsible stakeholder* due to the failure of defining Anglo-centric terms like *international system* and what it means to be a "*big country*" (like China and USA)

using a culture-neutral language (Farrelly & Wesley, 2018). These concepts can be defined in ME as follows:

> **Script 8: International system** (Farrelly & Wesley, 2018, p. 108)
> [People can think like this:]
> Many countries on Earth are parts of one big something. If some of these countries do some things, this can be very good for all these countries. If some of these countries don't do some things, this can be very bad for all these countries.

> **Script 9: "Big countries"** (Farrelly & Wesley, 2018, p. 108)
> [People can think like this:]
> Some countries are not like many other countries because they are very big countries. America is one of these countries. China is one of these countries. A country like this can do many things not like many other countries. If a country like this does some things, this can be very good for many other countries. If a country like this doesn't do some things, this can be very bad for many other countries.

At the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is stressed that I & Rs, especially those with limited English language proficiency, should have access to information about this pandemic in their own language (e.g., Ahmad & Hillman, 2021). Here, too, ME (and its translatable versions into other languages) can make a significant contribution. ME can be easier to acquire by I & Rs and if information about the Covid-19 can be phrased in ME, arguably, I & Rs will not be left behind and their right to accessible information about what affects their life directly will be provided. Script 10 captures the need to be aware and accommodate to the new normal.

> **Script 10:** (by Wierzbicka; B. Peeters, personal communication, April 10, 2020)
> It is good for all of us if we think like this every day now:
> This time is not like other times.
> Very bad things are happening to many people now.
> Very bad things are happening to many people's bodies because of the coronavirus, many people are dying because of this.
> Many other people feel something very very bad because of this.
> More people can die if I do some things now as I have always done.
> I don't want this; because of this I will not do these things now.
> I will be at home all the time when I don't have to be somewhere else.
> When I have to be for some time not at home, I will think like this all the time:
> "it will be bad if I am near other people., I don't want to be near anyone else".
> If I am someone like a doctor, I will always wear gloves, I will always wear a mask.

It follows that the use of "full/maximum" English, for advocates of ME, embeds myriads of meanings crucial to daily human experience in culture-laden English vocabulary, hiding them from view (which is why the word *explication* is used: NSM practitioners explicate in clear language what is otherwise hidden from view). In technical and academic contexts, hiding away such crucial differences may have—and often does have—adverse effects on people's lives (Marini, 2016; B. Peeters, personal communication, November, 11, 2018). In an interview on the relevance of NSM and ME in narrative medicine, Goddard reiterated that minimal English can help for a better doctor-patient (or professional-client in general) communication beyond cumbersome technical/scientific jargon, which is a hindrance to clear speaking (Marini, 2017b). In case the doctor or the patient (the professional or client) is an immigrant or refugee, ME could be a means of empowerment for I & Rs. We should always remember that "[i]n particular, immigrants who unwittingly violate [the target community's] norms are often seen as rude, difficult and odd (sometimes even by their own children)" (Wierzbicka, 2010, p. 72).

In a similar vein, ME (also Minimal Arabic, Chinese, Italian, etc.) can serve as the de facto lingua franca in encounters between I & Rs and the host culture's representatives. Guido (as cited in Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 49) reported an instance of a conflictual communication between Nigerian asylum seekers and Italian immigration officers even though both parties opted for English as the default language of communication. Seidlhofer (2011) comments on this situation are of interest for us, although she employed them to argue for a completely different point. She noted that the conflict arises from two sources. The first is that the situation is power-asymmetrical: refugees versus authoritative officials. This factor, if coexisting with stereotypical views, can be a real barrier facing I & Rs. The second is that the kind of (Nigerian) English employed by the immigrants might not be well perceived by the Italian officers who are instructed in a Standard variety of English (most probably British English). Prima facie, such conflicts where I & Rs are the weaker parties can be, if not eradicated, conspicuously minimized thanks to ME.

Indeed, I & Rs' communication in real-time can be supported by a prior consultation of a dictionary that covers the "invisible" of the host linguaculture by means of NSM/ME. Now, we have a pioneering example (i.e., *Australian dictionary of invisible culture for teachers* by Sadow, 2021), which explicates conversational practices, cultural keywords, values/attitudes, personal relations, requests/directives, and so on. Making such a dictionary a Mobile App could make it very accessible.

Discussion

The above theoretical elaboration addressed the contribution of "metalanguage" in enabling I & Rs' education and communication. The focus has been on the metalanguage known as NSM and its extended version ME, a well-established project in applied linguistics. This discussion is addressed to potential stakeholders including language educators/researchers, local immigration offices, education officials at central/local governments, non-for-profit organisations, United Nations' bodies involved with I & Rs, and so on.

Ethnopragmatic NSM/ME based instruction can be an efficient tool to help I & Rs cope with the psychological difficulties of the "waiting period" (e.g., waiting for the asylum demand to be processed, while having language and integration courses). It is a huge obstacle for them to overcome before they manage to start a new phase (Jabo & Tchamakdji, 2018). Therefore, ethnopragmatic instruction can be planned during this period to invest in the otherwise wasted time and help arrest I & Rs' worries about the future.

Producing teachers' guides and toolkits on NSM/ME-based instruction that give special attention to I & Rs' situations and traits: how to design NSM/ME-based lessons, foster motivation, assess learning outcomes, cope with the difficulties encountered, and so on (cf. Bernaus, Furlong, Jonckheere & Kervran, 2011; British Council, n.d.; Cohen & Weaver, 2005). Similarly, in tune with Sadow (2018), designing teaching resources based on NSM/ME ready to use in a given receiving linguaculture is highly recommended. Learners (I & Rs in this case) also require their own guides/toolkits too, which orient them on how to be more autonomous (cf. Cohen, 2005): use NSM/ME (e.g., to explicate observed behaviours/conversational practices, heard cultural keywords, phrasing the observed disparities between home and host linguacultures), learn from their real-life moments (e.g., a misunderstanding incident in the supermarket) by keeping a diary or a portfolio.

It is not necessary that NSM/ME-based instruction appear in publications, toolkits, and guides especially designed for it. It can readily be integrated into the existing ones (e.g., British Council, n.d.; Bernaus, Furlong, Jonckheere & Kervran, 2011). In a similar vein, and for "cost-benefit consideration" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2020, p. 21), NSM/ME-based instruction can be integrated as a constitutive part into the already existing "language integration programmes" (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008, p. 8) addressed to I & Rs.

Supporting teachers who practice in bi/multilingual contexts is inevitably needed as well (cf. Krumm & Plutzar, 2008). In this regard, implementing NSM/ME-based instruction and awareness about I & Rs' characteristics and language needs in teacher education programmes, in contexts where the presence of I & Rs is prevalent (cf. UNESCO Bangkok, 2020), is an urgent need. Thanks to the affordances of technology, an expert trainer/teacher in NSM/ME instruction and I & Rs' education could provide such training to geographically distant teachers. In a similar vein, NSM/ME should be part of intensive educational programmes addressed to I & Rs as well as immigration officers in the host countries. They are also relevant to professions where encounters with I & Rs are inescapable (e.g., in hospitals, hotels, businesses, public service facilities like airports).

NSM/ME should be employed in publications and content addressed to I & Rs worldwide, for example, to explicate culturally-laden and technical terms (e.g., politeness, rapport, rude, democracy, human rights, equity, discrimination, immigrant, asylum seeker) in culture-neutral terms.

While engaging in NSM/ME instruction, it is very insightful to conduct case studies and explore I & Rs' narratives so as to examine their responses on the effectiveness and challenges of this type of instruction (cf. Sadow, 2018). Moreover, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies on the effect of NSM/ME-based ethnopragmatic instruction addressed to I & Rs as well as the use of a metalanguage instead of a full-fledged language in educational and communication settings. The issue of testing in educational contexts involving I & Rs is of crucial importance (e.g., Krumm & Plutzar, 2008). Designing appropriate tests that fit the NSM/ME-based instruction (e.g., achievement or proficiency tests) and the I & Rs' situation is required. And also, the usefulness of assessment tools like portfolios, self-assessment, projects, observation, and tests (Krumm & Plutzar, 2008) should be empirically verified.

Conclusion

Through the present paper, I have sought to detail how "metalanguage" can contribute in I & Rs' education and dealings, demonstrating how the pioneer contribution of NSM/ME can be a useful pedagogical tool in cross-cultural education and an auxiliary language/a lingua franca in intercultural/international communication. I have argued in favour of NSM/ME as an enabling tool at the disposal of I & Rs. I have called, in agreement with pioneering NSM/ME advocates (Goddard, 2018; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014), for looking into the affordances of NSM/ME and their relevance to the I & Rs situation, especially at this time of uncertainties due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This cannot be achieved unless we encourage and bring to light the ongoing research on NSM/ME. I would argue that the United Nations Organisation should take the lead in this initiative. It is the organisation where the civilised world coalesces and the issues pertaining to its well-being are discussed. In this regard, language and communication issues should not be conceived as less important than other global concerns like Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, global terrorism, international solidarity, nuclear weapons non-proliferation, racial discrimination, and so forth. Hopefully, a common language that everyone can claim ownership of, and that reflects shared values rather than imposed ones, could be the first step in solving/coping with such global problems.

In the end it is necessary to acknowledge certain limitations of the present contribution. This paper was oftentimes a theoretical discussion that reviewed the related literature. At points I have provided certain practical tips for teaching. For the sake of illustration, I referred to "immigrants" and "refugees" as if they are a homogeneous group; however, distinguishing between these two groups (in addition to "migrants" and "asylum seekers") in practice would be very necessary. Moreover, individual traits of I & Rs in the present paper are only acknowledged but taking them into consideration in future work

to provide tailored instruction will be quite necessary too, though this might be extremely difficult in certain contexts. The present contribution is only a first step in raising awareness about the significance of metalanguage (NSM and ME mainly) for I & Rs and, indeed, further conceptualising, research, and instructional initiatives are desperately needed.

Acknowledgement

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