Review of "Natural Causes of Language: Frames, Biases, and Cultural Transmission"

Title	Natural Causes of Language: Frames, Biases, and Cultural Transmission
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This book contains a preface followed by five chapters and a conclusion. The preface outlines the scope of discussion and helps the reader to decide if he or she wants to continue reading. As a quick summary, the book answers the question how a language got to be what it is at present. Beyond the confines of words and sentences, interested readers are led to think about language as a larger system of human communication with several explicatory mechanisms. The book suggests a confluence of relationships and cultural connections operating in a speech community that lead to the fostering, propagating, and retaining of items in a language relevant to current communication. The operand underpinning the growth of language includes frames, biases and transmission.

In specific details, Enfield spells out clearly that his work offers three main points with regard to understanding the natural causes of linguistic systems. Firstly, the causal processes in linguistic reality apply in multiple frames or time scales. Secondly, for language and the rest of culture to exist, its constituent parts must be diffused and remains in circulation within the speakers' social histories. Thirdly, the socially circulating language and cultural elements are embedded within larger systems. According to Enfield, the third point is underappreciated.

The book argues that a language cannot be understood as a complete system devoid of the speakers that represent the speech community of the language. In other words, whenever a phrase or a series of word is put to academic scrutiny, we are always dealing with a portion of linguistic elements or meanings activated in a particular context of language use. On this matter, we are reminded by Enfield that:

> Language systems only exist because populations of linguistic items replicate and circulate in human communities, whenever people say things. (p. 22)

A tree diagram, in Enfield's words, directs our attention away from the causal mechanisms that define language as an evolutionary process, and languages as evolved systems (p. 8). Furthermore, the application of tree diagrams to represent the vertical lineage from a parent language to a daughter language is considered to be a misrepresentation, because it is ignoring the horizontal transfers between languages that underline a significant portion of linguistic units in a language spoken by various speakers.

Extending the notion of horizontal transfers, we may consider language contact situations as typical cross-languages phenomena common in ancient Southeast Asia, given the archeological evidence of Chinese artefacts found in the local Malay world including Temasek (Singapura), Melaka and Palembang pre-dating the colonial era (Miksic, 2015).

What can the foreign language teachers learn from a book espousing the mechanism that operates in language evolution? There are several interesting ideas related to language pedagogy worthy of our contemplations. Selected remarks from the book are identified and accorded additional elaborations for consideration as pedagogy suggestions in foreign language teaching.

We begin by inspecting these two points:

1. Knowledge of grammar causes instances of speaking; and
2. Instances of speaking cause knowledge of grammar. (p. 7)

The observations reflecting both sides of the same coin suggest that whenever any grammatical construction is taught in a language classroom, the language rule should be accorded an oral input to validate a communicative situation. Discursive spoken input provided by the language teacher in the forms of communicative phrases would become the practical and relevant reference to a foreign language learner as the basis of interaction in different speech settings. Expanding from acquiring the syntax of greetings, exchanging information and performing tasks in a foreign language, either spoken, written or digital, is the pragmatics of doing things, that is, the ultimate goal of every foreign language learner (see Lam, 2009).

In the second chapter, Enfield informs that it is only by adopting multiple frames that language may be explained adequately. Language is a potential system to evolve constantly due to the speakers' choice of content and his preferred speech style. A particular remark in Enfield's discussion makes a good explication in Malay language classes:

> In a microgenetic frame, people may want to save energy by shortening a word that they say often … (p. 18)

The quote above is important to clarify communicative variations in actual lexical outputs. In teaching Malay as foreign language, for example, Sew (2015a) invokes the same point to account for the simplified variations in the actual Malay morphological reproductions. In this review, lexical items are whole and complete forms, whereas morphological reproductions are lexical tokens invoked during foreign language learning interactions. The diachronic view of language as a constantly evolving system becomes a useful and necessary explanation to account for the simplified lexical forms found in typical Malay conversations, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Simplified forms of Malay in daily communication

Malay dictionary entries	Malay conversation forms	Meaning
BAHARU	BAHRU > BARU	new
BUKAN	KAN	not
DAHULU	DULU	first
HENDAK	NAK	want
MAHU	MAU	want
INI	NI	this
ITU	TU	itu
SAHAJA	SAJA > AJA	only
SUDAH	DAH	already
TAHU	TAU	know
TIDAK	TAK	not
TIDAK USAH	TAUSAH > USAH	Do not/no need
BERSAMA-SAMA	BERSAMA	together
LAKI-LAKI	LAKI	Man/husband
PERLAHAN-LAHAN	PERLAHAN	slowly

Without proper linguistic comparisons, learners of Malay may develop the view that the spoken Malay variants are part of the speech style used in casual interactions by uneducated speakers. To rectify such bias, language teachers may highlight the claim about saving energy in conversation as a natural speech style with examples from another language as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Variations of selected English lexical forms

Current English word	Simplified English (conversational) word
Cannot	Can't
Chairperson	Chair
Do not	Don't
Does not	Doesn't
Examination	Exam
Have not	Haven't
Hullabaloo	Hoo-ha
Spiced ham	Spam
Technology	Tech
Typing error	Typo
University	Uni
Web log	Blog
Would not	Wouldn't

The data in Table 2 would dispel any misconception of simplified Malay variants for English-speaking Malay language learners. The data of the two languages in Tables 1 and 2 serve to accentuate the universal tendency of actual morphological production within a lived communicative system. Foreign language teachers teaching Chinese learners may consider highlighting the following simplified forms in Chinese Mandarin:

Table 3. Variations of current Chinese Mandarin phrases

Current Mandarin phrases	Current simplified Mandarin phrases	English glosses
爸爸	爸	Father
妈妈	妈	Mother
哥哥	哥	Elder brother
姐姐	姐	Elder sister
三块钱	三块	Three dollars
五点钟	五点	Five o'clock
公共汽车	公车	Bus

The additional information on language evolution in Enfield's book helps a foreign language teacher to account for the variations of the language elements constituted in the larger system of human communication.

In Chapter 3, Enfield outlines four steps identified as the schemata of successful culture circulation in macrocosm. These stages include *exposure, representation, reproduction* and *material* (p. 27). The first two stages involve cognitive processes through which the cultural input is perceived and stored in the mind, while the last two stages require individual motivation and physical reproduction to activate cultural transmission. From the standpoint of foreign language learning, these stages form a progression of impactful learning. Successful acquisition of foreign language inputs requires the delivery of lessons to be receptive and commemorative enough to motivate learners into reproducing their language learning as a series of functional outputs.

Understanding the cognitive-receptiveness of learning suggests that language pedagogy requires detailed planning of lesson units with relevant examples and audio-visual supporting

materials to amplify learning stimulation. Foreign language learners may be intrinsically motivated to learn a foreign language as communicative capital to understand patients in healthcare or clients in a social work setting. Despite intrinsic motivation, effort to galvanize learning may be developed with extrinsic motivation to initiate learning participation at the tertiary level. Learners may be extrinsically motivated with progressive assessment built into the curriculum (Sew, 2009, 2012). In this sense, Enfield's book on language as a system derived from natural causes is also useful to generate ideas for foreign language pedagogy.

Chapter 4 of this book informs the readers that the understanding of language as an evolving existence becomes difficult when the analysis begins with partial linguistic elements. The following passage from Enfield's book (p. 50), based on Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985, p. 8–9), illustrates the point:

> If we start from the concept of an underlying system this becomes an extremely difficult if not insoluble problem; if however we approach it from the point of view of the degree of coherence evidenced in the behavior of a group of individuals, the problem is seen to be one of relationships and of stereotypes inherent in each individual.

There is the risk of under-appreciating the concepts of *incorporation* and *contextualization*, if the basis of language teaching is founded on word categories. Incorporation and contextualization are two systemic functions that chart the operand of language within the larger frames of macrocosm. As a means to demonstrate this point, Enfield uses the marriage rule within a kinship system (p. 44).

The appreciation of language as a reflex of cultural schema is indeed useful to foreign language education. For example, a Malay language teacher may teach "Apa khabar?" as a lexical composite in Malay syntax, as well as a formulaic expression in phatic communion. By invoking the concept of incorporation, one may use "khabar" (news) as the head word in the two-word phrase, and "apa" (what) as its modifier. The phrase becomes a question-like expression used in the ritual of Malay greetings. Contextualization, on the other hand, is the explanation for foreign language learners to understand that "apa khabar" (which literally means "what news") is an inappropriate expression for showing concern to a sick friend or kin, because historically the phrase functions as a question for checking on one's safety in political and religious emergencies.

An interesting notion in *Chapter 5* is that the agenda of foreign language education may include producing speakers who are capable of showing dispositions of cultural allegiance. Such an idea illustrates the significance of socially organized conduct not least, because others' interpretations of one's behavior become the constraints on how one would speak and behave. This is a powerful social linguistic force in inducing a speaker to conform (p. 52). Indeed, social harmony is the working basis for foreign language speakers to practice communication in everyday interaction (see Filieri, 2016). As a rule of thumb, foreign language teachers may consider including cultural semiotics and speech poetics as part of the language learning material towards developing a sense of community, whenever the learners engage in foreign language interaction (Sew, 2015b).

In many ways, teaching a foreign language is to chart the causes that are impactful for initiating learning activities with learners and motivates their syntactic and morphological reproductions in foreign language meaningfully. The presentation of the content in this book is relatively straightforward, as Enfield makes the effort to optimize understanding regardless of one's specialization. To anybody interested in interfacing the ideas of language as a dynamic system with language teaching and learning, Enfield's book is relevant, because it enriches a teacher's vista in reflecting on foreign language pedagogy.

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