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The Nexus Between Language and Perception:

Using Chinese Traditional Medicine as a Case Study

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In this paper I will discuss the nexus between language and perception using a comparison between Western biomedicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine as a case study. From the Western point of view, the human body is objective; however, when we investigate the origins of medicine in the West and in China our sense of a universal reality wavers (Kuriyama 8). The human body is perceived differently in biomedicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. “If a patient is cured by means of herbs or acupuncture, they see only two possible explanations: Either the cure was a placebo effect, or it was an accident...” (Kaptchuk 1). This investigation attempts to investigate what it is about language that allows it to shape our reality and, in this case, create two different yet valid healing systems that work on the objective body.

Although the body is objective, it is perceived subjectively in the sense that the body in Traditional Chinese Medicine is not the same body as in biomedicine. A Western physician and a Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner perceive different realities when examining the body. As a result, the kinds of knowledge one is able to learn about the body are different between these two healing systems. In this paper I will investigate the ways in which language shapes our perception and allows these two different healing systems to perceive different realities when looking at the human body; these differences in perception of the body ultimately influence biomedicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. The core of my thesis is based on the idea that language does not necessarily function in a causal relationship with perception; instead, I will argue that language, from the level of lexical items to the level of syntax and finally to the level of the philosophical understanding of language, influences but does not limit how we perceive the world, how we perceive our bodies, and how we understand the idea of selfhood in both the natural world and in the metaphysical world.

This thesis will consider several problems: The first problem is that there are different lexical items that are used to refer to the body in biomedicine than in Traditional Chinese Medicine; this leads to issues of translation especially when dealing with Western students training to become TCM practitioners without having the language or cultural background that Chinese students might have. The second problem is understanding traditional Chinese syntax; the syntax of classical Chinese allows for a different conception of change. This will allow us to see why diagnosis as a tool is important in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The final problem I will discuss is the difference between how language itself is understood in Western philosophical traditions compared to Chinese philosophical traditions; the discussion of language on this level is also closely intertwined with how humanity is understood ontologically.

I. Lexemes

The first level of language in this discussion is lexical; in this discussion, we will see that lexemes are linked to mental images, cultural concepts, and styles of life or practices. In Traditional Chinese Medicine there are concepts, terms, and phenomena that do not exist in Western biomedicine. In *Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, Shigehisa Kuriyama provides an extensive example: the difference between *mo* and pulse. When someone puts their fingers on my wrist, they “feel” my artery expanding and contracting and are able to get information about how many times my heart beats per minute. *Mo* is an important concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine as it is used as a tool for diagnosis; *mo* is blood and *qi*, two substances that are vital to life in Traditional Chinese Medicine. In TCM doctors palpate *mo* and are able to “feel” various organs throughout the body and properly diagnose the patient (Kuriyama 40). Additionally, there are several places to palpate *mo* on the

wrist while there is only one pulse. Different points and different amounts of pressure used for palpation of mo correspond to different organs while the arteries used in pulse taking only correspond to the heart. Initially, the practice of taking a pulse and palpating mo look quite similar; it is only when we investigate the meanings of the words “pulse” and “mo” that we learn that the practices are different and that different knowledge about the body is gathered when a practitioner takes a pulse than when a practitioner palpates mo.

The difference between the perception of the throbbing at the wrist in biomedicine and TCM lies in language and imagination. “Specific ideas ... can shape what the fingers feel” (Kuriyama 66). When I take my pulse I am imagining that I am feeling the tubes in my wrist through which blood flows which expand and contract when my heart beats. I personally have no empirical knowledge that this is true but nevertheless this is what I understand to be happening inside my body because of the culture in which I was raised; most Americans learn about basic biology or first aid in school and take for granted the fact that taking pulse means feeling the arteries. By contrast, mo is imagined as conduits flowing like rivers through the body (Kuriyama 50). The difference arises in the mental image that is conjured for each word which leads to a “gap between touching and feeling”; this is the gap between the objective and the subjective (Kuriyama 63). How we perceive experiences, in this case the experience of the sensation of touch, is shaped by what we imagine them to be.

By asking the questions “what is mo” and “what is pulse” we are able to see that the terms are connected to two different realities. The word “pulse” only allows us to talk about arteries and the rate of the heart’s beating while the word “mo” allows us to talk about our bodies using language that we (in the West) would most likely never use. To elaborate: mo is imagined like flowing rivers; this allows for language like slippery, rough, and empty to be used to

describe how mo is felt in the twenty eight different kinds of pulses TCM recognizes. Historically, Western physicians complained that the language in TCM was too “fantastical”; indeed it would be fantastical to talk about pulse as being slippery, rough, or empty, but to talk about mo in this manner is plausible because of the reality that is connected to that concept. The different realities that are created around these terms allow for different conceptual possibilities of understanding, and it is these different categories of understanding that are at work in different lexemes. For example, in the West we are unable to physically perceive the difference between a slippery and rough or floating and sunken pulse because the reality about what happens when you palpate someone’s wrist doesn’t contain these kinds of concepts. Furthermore, even the knowledge that you could feel these things when palpating someone’s wrist does not immediately allow me to be able to perceive these subtleties; one needs to cultivate his or her perception of these categories through practice. Part of what makes this difficult for Westerners is that while the pulse is invisible, arteries are visible; anatomy works to verify our imagination when pulse taking. What is felt when palpating mo is also invisible, but we cannot use anatomy to empirically verify mo (because we are not feeling the arteries) but, this is not to say that mo is not empirically verifiable at all. The existence of mo and its legitimacy as a tool for feeling organs and ailments is verified through the diagnosis of illnesses based on the knowledge learned through palpation.

Crucial to this discussion is the theory of linguistic relativity. “Linguistic relativity is commonly defined as ‘the claim that the *words* your language gives you determine and *limit* what it is possible for you to think’” (Sharifian 83 cites Leavitt 2015 p. 19). According to a strong version of this theory, it should be impossible for someone who does not have knowledge of Chinese ever to understand what mo is despite practice. This suggests an inherently causal

relationship between language and perception. Farzad Sharifian proposes a less deterministic version of the theory of linguistic relativity with the theory of Cultural Linguistics.

“Cultural Linguistics is a discipline with multidisciplinary origins that explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptions” (Cultural Linguistics 84). The notion of *cultural cognition* is crucial to the idea of cultural linguistics because that is what allows us to create *cultural conceptions* that construct meaning making. Cultural cognition is considered to be: (a) emergent because it arises as a result of interactions between individuals, (b) heterogeneous because it is distributed unevenly among speakers of a shared speech community (not all speakers share the same cultural conceptions for lexemes), and (c) dynamic because culture is conceived of as “productive representations of a growing repertoire capable of generating new responses to novel situations that still make sense to cultural groups” (Distributed 6). Cultural cognition is essentially a way to describe culture as an analytical tool rather than an abstract concept. That cultural cognition is dynamic is a crucial difference from the theory of linguistic relativity because it explicitly states that speakers of a language are able to understand and conceptualize things that are not typically in their repertoire of conceptualizations.

Conceptual processes that constitute meaning making emerge from linguistic interactions; when these linguistic interactions are culturally informed (i.e. we use cultural cognition), they generate cultural conceptualizations such as: *cultural schematization*, *cultural categorization*, and *cultural mapping* or *cultural metaphor*.¹ Sharifian states that: “Cultural conceptualizations and their realization in language are at the heart of cultural cognition”

¹ *Schematization* is abstracting conceptual schemas from experience. *Categorization* is assigning experiences of various kinds to our pre-established cognitive categories. *Mapping* is mapping between different conceptual domains. Sharifian believes that how one schematizes, categorizes, or maps is based on one’s culture.

(Cultural Linguistics 84). It is here that we can see the connection between language and cultural cognition; language provides a space for speakers to construct meanings about their experience while language structure and language use, in turn, draw on and reflect cultural cognition (Cultural Linguistics 84). To my mind, the virtue of Cultural Linguistics lies in its ability to envision the relationship between language and perception as one that is not causal or limiting.

Both of these theories suggest that, since English speakers do not use the same words to talk about the body and do not perceive reality in the same way, they may not be able to learn about and use the concepts in Traditional Chinese Medicine well enough to become practitioners. Yet, TCM is still taught and practiced throughout the world. In Sonya Pritzker's "Living Translation in U.S. Chinese Medicine," she investigates issues regarding translation and cultural linguistics through how Westerners study Traditional Chinese Medicine. She conducted her ethnographic study by observing a class in a school for Traditional Chinese Medicine in California over the course of their two years of study.

One of the main issues in her discussion of translation is the lack of a standard one-to-one translation of concepts in TCM to English. Pritzker proposes that "translation" is understood as an ongoing event with "implications far beyond the simple transfer of meaning from 'source' to 'target' languages" (Pritzker 343). Consider one student's inability to understand the word *rheum*, the English rendering for the word *yin*. While another student in the class simply translates it to *mucus*, her professor, a native Chinese speaker, uses other Chinese terms to give her the definition. While *rheum* and *mucus* may be a convenient one-to-one translation of a word used in TCM into its biomedical counterpart, the use of Chinese to give the translation is significant because it highlights the fact that *rheum* is connected to other cultural conceptions in

English and the student's professor urges her to understand it in its own words and context rather than the context of Western medicine. This is very similar to the issue with mo and pulse; mo cannot be translated as pulse, even though they might superficially seem like the same thing, because they are not the same concept and the term mo is connected to concepts that do not have anything to do with the biomedical notion of what a pulse is. Mo must be defined in other terms to give an accurate "translation". This incident also sparks the discussion of "whether biomedical and scientific terminology should be used to translate Chinese medical concepts into English ..." (Pritzker 346).

In *Revolution of the Ordinary* Toril Moi investigates how Wittgenstein theorizes that word meaning is not grounded in anything deeper than its use. This definition contrasts with the naïve referential or Augustinian theory of meaning which posits word meaning as simply the object in the real world they refer to. It becomes obvious soon enough that this naïve theory can only take us so far. The problem Wittgenstein gives us to work out is that of five red apples. A customer comes into a shop and hands the shopkeeper a note marked "five red apples". The shopkeeper opens the drawer with the apples, looks up "red" on a color chart, and takes out five red apples. How does the shopkeeper know what the note means? We can see that the naïve referential theory only takes us to the first step of opening the drawer with the apples; apples are the only part of the request with a referent. "Red" and "five" are where we run into problems. We are trying to understand how the shopkeeper understands the *meaning* of the request; superficially, it may seem like he just needs to know the meaning of the words to know what to do with the request. Wittgenstein argues that to find the meaning of the request the shopkeeper does not need to know what the words "red" and "five" mean, only how they are used in the request. Words get their meanings from practices that then become their conventional meanings.

In working through Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as use, we are provided with insights into the problems of translation. In one section of her book, Moi recounts an excerpt from Julio Cortazar's book *A Certain Lucas* in which Lucas, a Spanish teacher in France, is instructed to teach his class Castilian Spanish rather than his native Argentinian dialect. In teaching his class 'proper' Spanish he gives them an article on bullfighting which, despite their efforts to translate through their knowledge and with dictionary definitions, they are unable to do and are frustrated by the translations that they come up with because they do not make sense.

The issue for the students is not that they do not know the meanings of the words; clearly they do for they have their Spanish to French dictionaries on hand. The problem is that the words do not have their conventional meanings in the context of bullfighting. For instance, the bulls in the article are described as being *soso* and *manso*; if you look the words up in a dictionary they are translated into *bland* and *meek* respectively. How is a bull in a bullfight supposed to be bland or meek? In her own struggle to translate the article Moi states: "However many times I looked them up, the dictionary failed to tell me what I needed to know about these words" (Moi 31). Basic dictionary translation fails because dictionaries do not tell us that the words are used differently in different contexts; in the practice of bullfighting, the words *soso* and *manso* mean different things than they do in every day usage. We could say bullfighting Spanish is different from conventional Spanish; you need to learn the language to learn the style of life.

This is similar to the translation problem we examined from Pritzker's ethnography. For the student, looking up the definition of *rheum* in the dictionary was insufficient. She needed to understand how to use the word in the context of practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine to know the meaning of *rheum*. Furthermore, it can be argued that until the student knows how to

use the word *rheum* she is not seeing it properly. (A food critic who can't tell the difference between *en croûte* and *en papillote* cannot write about them if he or she does not know what they are). In learning the word, the student is able to open her worldview a little bit and learn to see something she could not before.

To conclude the discussion on lexemes, it is necessary to include information regarding the history of the translation of terms from Traditional Chinese Medicine into Western terminology. Paul Unschuld has criticized Twentieth Century scholar of TCM, Manfred Porkert for translating Traditional Chinese Medical terminology into Latin and Greek terms which are common in Western biomedical terminology. For example, he translated the term *xue* which literally translates to holes or caverns but is rendered “acupuncture points” in the West into *foramina* (Traditional Chinese Medicine 128). While this might make the terminology used more “scientific”, Porkert misunderstood the value of metaphorical meanings that are meant to be gathered from using a more “fantastical” translation. While the Latin renderings may suffice in the West, in China, traditionally, more metaphorical language was used to describe the body. This kind of “fantastical” language, however, is actually more accurate than obscure in terms of how the body is viewed in TCM (i.e. mo and pulse being conceived of as rivers rather than arteries); it reflects the fact that language is used differently in China than in the West. Unschuld mainly takes umbrage with Porkert because of how influential Porkert was to the development of TCM in the West. Doves of other scholars and practitioners use Porkert's translations and he has essentially created a TCM in a Western context for Western practitioners.

It is important to note that the Traditional Chinese Medicine that is taught and practiced today does not come directly from antiquity. While some assert that Western medical terms should not be used in a TCM classroom, Unschuld clarifies that Traditional Chinese Medicine as

it is practiced today is inherently infused with Western medical terminology. When China came into contact with the West in the Twentieth Century, TCM in China underwent a change; the healing system became infused with Western science in order to become considered a legitimate practice (by Western standards) that could be exported throughout the Western world.

Furthermore, he suggests that Chinese students of TCM today, like non-Chinese students, lack the historical and cultural background that would allow for the cultivation of perception in question.

The final issue that needs to be considered in the discussion of translation is that of differences in what is considered to be valid empirical knowledge. While in the previous example the student was having trouble understanding the meaning of the words, Pritzker's other example is that of an incident where a student had difficulty understanding what *rheum* was in a classroom setting. Once she does her clinical she is able to see the actual substance her texts are referring to. She is only able to fully understand the meaning of the term after she has empirical knowledge of it; this becomes problematic because there are some concepts in TCM, like *mo* or *qi*, that cannot be observed empirically through sight like *rheum*. If Western students of TCM have no linguistic or cultural background to understand these terms and they also cannot observe them empirically, how is it possible for them to diagnose and treat patients using TCM?

II. Syntax

The next level in this discussion of language and perception is syntax or grammar. In *The Silent Transformations*, Francois Jullien discusses the issue that Westerners have with understanding process or '*bian-tong*' in Chinese. To discuss how significant the influence of the

process/transformation is in Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is necessary to understand what it is first. One example to help understand is the process of snow becoming water. This transformation is visible but also imperceptible (i.e. we have no language to talk about what snow is as it changes to water). Snow becomes water without passing any sort of threshold; the change occurs continuously. Another example of the transformation is that of ageing; this is another 'silent' transformation because while we can see it we cannot perceive it (Jullien 41). One is always aging but doesn't realize it until he or she looks at an old photograph one day and realizes that he or she is completely different.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the term 'imperceptible'; to do so we can elaborate on the example of snow becoming water. The skeptical reader might say: "what do you mean it's imperceptible?" Clearly it is not because if I bring some snow inside and put it on a plate I can watch it melt and turn into a puddle of water. The issue at hand here is less about actual seeing and more about saying. Jullien explains that Western syntax does not allow us to talk about the transformation; that snow is necessarily cold and water is necessarily warm is not about the physical objects, it's about the word itself. While physical snow is cold it may become warm which is why it has the ability to melt. The term "snow" however cannot contain "warm" in its definition because then it is not snow anymore. We don't have the language or framework to conceive of transformation. This makes the transformation imperceptible to us in the West in the way that Wittgenstein says learning a language is learning to see. We can see snow melt and turn to water, but we cannot perceive the transformation that is occurring as a process of continuation and modification.

In his book, Jullien argues that traditionally Western philosophy has a preoccupation with 'being' or the object; 'being' or object in this sense of the term refers to the fact that, in the West,

words are thought to have fixed definitions (i.e. why 'warm' cannot be part of the definition of 'snow'). This preoccupation has stifled Western philosophy's ability to understand and embrace transformation the way Chinese philosophers do. Jullien suggests that this preoccupation with 'being' is tied to the way Western syntax works. The influence of syntax is reflected in how we understand or attempt to understand the process. Take, for example, the sentence "I am ageing"; 'I' is the subject of the statement and 'ageing' is what's happening to the subject. In trying to understand the process, one might imagine something like age happening to the subject. This effectively works to separate the process from the being/subject; the being is the constant and the process is a change that is occurring to it that can neither be perceived nor understood.

By contrast, traditional Chinese language functions without a subject. This allows one to talk about a process without needing to compromise the sentence by separating the subject to assist in understanding a process like in Western languages. To understand why transformation is easier to conceptualize through traditional Chinese grammar we can see that there are three categories of words, nominal or nouns, verbs and adjectives, just like in Western syntax but none of the words in the sentence acts as a subject; that is, sentences will have these grammatical categories like modern English but there is no subject given for the sentence so there is no being to act as the actor of the sentence (Jullien 44-45). Instead of the sentence "Snow is melting" in which snow is the subject and main part of the sentence, in traditional Chinese grammar, melting would be the main focus of the sentence. The transformation itself is what is being spoken about, not its effect on the subject which would effectively make the sentence about the subject like in Western syntax. Jullien takes pains to give his reader an accurate translation of traditional Chinese philosophical texts, well aware that translating them fully into French would change the

meaning because it would be forced to conform to the French subject-object-verb syntactic structure; most texts of Chinese philosophy is rendered into Western syntax when it is translated.

Through Jullien's argument, it becomes evident that grammar has an influence on our perception in terms of a thought process; he suggests that Western and Chinese philosophy developed with different notions of change and being in part because of this influence.

Understanding how the transformation is conceptualized in Chinese thought is important because of its influence on perception of the body. Some of the limitations in understanding 'transformation' comes from our translation of the term '*bian-tong*'. In the West we simply translate '*bian-tong*' as 'transformation', however, it actually denotes two terms: 'modification-continuation' (Jullien 20). The example Jullien provides here is that of the seasons.

Modification occurs from winter to spring when cold is reversed; continuation occurs from spring to summer when it gets hotter. The preoccupation is on the transformation itself and not the being; we do not need to be concerned with the fact that winter is cold and spring is warm so winter cannot become warm because cold is a necessary property.

Change, in the West, is traditionally seen as something negative; "the more something is *determined* the more it 'exists'". In Platonic theory, the Realm of Forms is ideal because it is unchanging while our world is in a state of constant flux. An object is *determined* because it has fixed properties. To better understand, Jullien gives the example of snow becoming water. "Plato is unable to think of snow *in the process of melting*" (Jullien 32). This is tied into the Western notion of 'being'. Snow is cold; it should not be possible for snow to become water because cold is necessarily a quality of snow. The addition of heat (which is required to make it water) would not allow it to remain snow. Due to the preoccupation with being, the subtle transformation is missed.

Another way we can see that language facilitates perception is in the field of cognitive linguistics or psycholinguistics. One study that we can look at to see that language facilitates perception is “Russian blues reveal effect of language on color perception” (Jonathan et. al.). In Russian, dark blues (*siniy*) and light blues (*goluboy*) are separated categorically in the language. In this study, English speakers and Russian speakers were presented with one block of blue with two choices underneath. The subject would have to determine which of the two choices was the same color as the initial block. Russian speakers had better reaction time and more accuracy in this task; this is attributed to the fact that dark blue and light blue belong to different categories. While the English speaking subjects can distinguish between light blues and dark blues they cannot do so as quickly or efficiently as the Russian speakers. The Russian language –the fact that there are separate words for light blue and dark blue- allow them to perceive light blues and dark blues as being different colors.

The difference in the notion of transformation has a clear influence on the development of medicine in the West and in China. While Western medicine developed to have a fixation with mapping and understanding the mechanics of the body, Traditional Chinese Medicine is concerned with diagnosing patterns of symptoms. As previously mentioned, Western philosophy was concerned with answering the question “What is it?” which led to the question “What is the body?” This search eventually led Western doctors to practice dissection and autopsy. To be able to say “The body is...” one must see the organs and tissues, understand what they all do, and understand how they work together to create a functioning body. In the West, the best way to understand what the body is was to open the body and be able to definitively say what it is comprised of. The power in biomedicine comes from empirical knowledge of the body’s interior. Traditionally, in TCM the power of the physician lies in his or her ability to see the

patterns of transformation in the body and diagnose without anatomical knowledge of the body. The ability to diagnose and see patterns shows understanding of how transformations work in the body. The physician sees the exterior expression of an illness (which here can be seen as a process) on the body through palpation of *mo* and other ways is able to diagnose the patient and treats the patient by modifying the process.

Part III: Philosophy

The final level of this discussion deals with how language is conceptualized philosophically. We will examine the notion that how language itself functions philosophically both influences and is influenced by how the body is conceptualized in the West and in China. First for the West, we will examine Gottlob Frege's writings on the philosophy of language; his work presupposes the notion of dualism, or the belief that in addition to the tangible world we live in, there is a metaphysical realm as well.²

To preface the discussion on *On Sense and Reference*, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the Platonic Theory of Forms as Frege's Dualism draws on Plato's legacy; Plato posits the existence of two worlds: the intelligible world, populated by Forms, and the sensible world, populated by sensible particulars (Sedley 11). Plato taught that all physical entities (everything that exists in this tangible realm) are subject to change (Sedley 7). According to Plato, mathematical truths and objects of knowledge, anything that can be discerned without any sense knowledge, are non-physical entities and are not subject to change (Sedley 7). These non-physical entities are called forms (*eidos* in Greek). While physical bodies exist in the physical

² Frege's *On Sense and Reference* is ideal to use in this discussion because of his dualism but also because his theory deals with talking about things that don't have a real world referent. We can use this theory to talk about terms that exist in Traditional Chinese Medicine but do not exist in biomedicine because we do not necessarily need the referent to understand it.

world, our souls are eternal non-physical entities which is why we have knowledge of the eternal truths that exist in the Realm of Forms. Additionally, for everything that exists in the physical world, there is a corresponding ideal non-physical entity that exists. Furthermore, physical entities owe their characteristics to their corresponding Forms. For example, Triangle exists in the Realm of Forms; this is the ideal, most essential version of a triangle. Every other triangle that exists in the physical realm resembles Triangle but is still imperfect because it is not ideal, it is not eternal, and it is subject to change.

In his essay, Frege proposes a linguistic theory of meaning that is based on the Theory of Forms. Frege investigates where we get meanings for words and, more interestingly, why we are able to talk of things that do not exist. In his argument, Frege makes a distinction among *sign*, *sense*, and *reference*. The *sign* is the way in which we express ideas; to put it more simply, the sign is the word itself, the sounds or symbols that we use to denote something. The *reference* is what the sign is referring to on the physical plane. To illustrate, when I say “My cup is on the table” the references for “cup” and “table” are those physical objects. The *sense* mediates the sign and the reference. Each sign has a definite sense and that sense has a definite reference. Sense is essentially the meaning of the word. Frege’s theory of meaning also helps answer the question of language ambiguity (why we have different words in different languages for the same thing); word meanings share a sense and referent but not a sign and thus we can have different words that refer to the same thing. Finally, Frege holds that there is not one necessary sign for each sense and reference.

Frege is a dualist because he proposes that since the *sense* of a word is non-physical and objective, it is a Platonic Form. To elaborate: When I say “My cup is on the table”, I am referring to a specific physical “cup” and “table” but the meaning of cup and table relates back to

the metaphysical notion of what those items are i.e. Cup and Table. This is also why we are able to talk about things that do not exist like “unicorn”; while a sign must have a sense, it need not have a referent. Frege’s theory of meaning demonstrates that, in some Western philosophical traditions, language is viewed as a tool to get a glimpse of the metaphysical. Just by speaking, we are invoking thoughts of the metaphysical realm without doing so intentionally.

Another Western tradition that conceived of language as a way to reach the metaphysical was Kabbalah, a type of Jewish Mysticism. Mysticism is “the process of striving for an intense relationship with God, sometimes going so far as to achieve an altered state” (Horwitz 3). There are many schools of Kabbalah that have somewhat different goals; for example, one school focuses on “cleaving” to God and having an intense intimate relationship with Him at all times while other schools focus on the messianic message of Judaism and attempt to use human action to bring upon the apocalypse (Horwitz 6-7). While the goal of many Abrahamic traditions is to have a close relationship with God, mysticism implies something more; that is actually seeing God and sharing a presence with Him.

What all of these different schools have in common, however, is the importance of language. Kabbalists believe that “God created the world by means of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet...” (Matt 4). This means that Hebrew is a sacred language that God shared with humans. Since Hebrew is considered to be special and holy, Kabbalists recite prayers in Hebrew to create an intense sense of nearness to God (Matt 326). In this sense of prayer, the significance is less on the act of praying and more on the fact that those praying are using this sacred language; if one were to use a language other than Hebrew he or she would not be able to have a transcendental experience with God. In Kabbalah, language is viewed not only as a way

that God reveals himself to us as well as a way that humans are able to bridge the gap between the visible and the divine.

These ideas of language as a way to reach the metaphysical coincide with ancient notions of the body. Kuriyama seeks to understand why autopsy, dissection, and muscularity were of such importance to the development of ancient Greek medicine and why they were not of importance in the development of Chinese medicine. Ancient peoples practiced dissection not necessarily to gain medical information, but to know the body itself (Kuriyama 120). Kuriyama suggests that dissection was seen as an epic meditation on the awe inspired by the body's divine design. "To know the body was to see how Nature shaped each part perfectly for its end, that is to say its use" (Kuriyama 123). Nature, in this instance, is the higher metaphysical power that created the world and its parts; understanding how Nature perfectly designed the human body, we can understand Nature itself. In this way we can see that just as language was conceptualized as something that connects us in the physical plane to the metaphysical plane, the visible body was seen as an object through which one can understand an invisible higher power.

This is not to say that there was no such thing as autopsy in ancient China. There are records of dissection being performed but what is different is what these Chinese physicians saw. The ancient Greeks performed dissection and saw a divine influence; this inspired them to understand each organ, muscle, and tendon to see what each purpose was. The accounts of dissection in ancient china tell s different story; they were focused more on the size, shape, weight, and color of the organs. They considered these measurements to be the standards of the organs for everyone. This information was not used further in Chinese medicine while the information the ancient Greeks found was a major influence on the development of medicine in

the West. Since the notion of humanity's place in the universe was different, the notion of the body itself was different.

Language in China, on the other hand, is not conceptualized as a way to reach the metaphysical in the sense that it is a separate invisible plane of existence that can be reached through some sort of transcendence; a breakthrough is needed to reach the higher plane from this physical plane. According to Jullien, however, China's philosophy functions without a notion of the metaphysical in this arguably narrow sense of the term. Jullien reaches this conclusion through his investigation into the notion of transformation or *bian-tong* (modification-continuation); Jullien calls this the *silent transformation* because things are constantly changing without this change being perceived. Silent transformations lead to reversals (Jullien 69). Take, for instance, the previous example of the seasons. Winter is modified into Spring, which is then continued into Summer, which is modified into Fall, which is then continued to Winter again. Here, transformation leads to a reversal (Winter and Summer), but it ultimately engenders its own self (Winter comes again at the end of the cycle and becomes the beginning again). As Jullien expresses this, "every end is already a beginning because the transition is continuous" (Jullien 73). This notion, contrary to the Greek notion of causality, is that of polarity which is part of the yin yang theory; it is the transformation that allows objects to exist within their opposites and allows things to be perceived as constantly changing or generating things.

In the Platonic tradition, the metaphysical plane is seen as invisible and unchanging; in Chinese philosophy these invisible or imperceptible changes occur on the same plane as the visible perceptible changes. The modification is visible because it shows the emergence of change but the continuation is invisible because it is more subtle (but it still occurs and its effects are still felt). Since there is no concept of non-change in Chinese philosophy, there is no need to

contemplate an invisible, metaphysical realm in which things do not change. Instead, visible and invisible changes both occur on the physical plane.

Yet if language in China is not conceptualized as an object through which one can reach the invisible plane, it is instead conceptualized as something that relates to the visible plane in a different way. This is evidenced in the *Analects* of Confucius where he discusses the importance of words and speaking. Confucius was the first historical Chinese philosopher and his teachings are said to have shaped Chinese culture as his philosophical teachings and ethics are very similar to what constitutes a collective culture. In the *Analects*, Confucius discusses his social philosophy; he views society as a structure of human relationships. Much of his teachings focus on the idea of virtue and urge people to act and speak in a virtuous manner. Thus, it is important to achieve harmony in relationships to achieve a good society. “Confucius saw that societies flourished when their citizens honored moral principles, and inevitably crumbled when they ignored it” (Hinton 9).

Language in the Confucian tradition is conceptualized as something that can be used as a facilitator to promote harmony in social relationships. Words and speaking are important to the concept of self-cultivation; Confucius teaches that words can be used as a way to promote moral self-cultivation and also serve as a reflection of one’s morality. The more sincere one’s speech is the more moral he or she is said to be. Confucius suggests we “incorporate moral qualities” in our speech so as not to stray away from virtue; if we do not watch the kind of language we use, we are not working to morally cultivate ourselves. It is also important to note that the stress on social harmony is connected to the idea that humanity is in intimate contact with the natural processes and the larger cosmos. “The genuine Chinese cosmogony is that of organismic process, meaning that all the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole...” (Mote

15). “Confucius was convinced that the cosmos is a moral order and that human affairs can only prosper when they are in harmony with the moral nature of the world” (Mote 39). Morality was seen as something that was objective so there was only one way to use language to promote morality and social harmony.

This idea of self-cultivation is also used in relation to the body. This is in part because there is no body-mind schism in Traditional Chinese Medicine like there is in biomedicine. The idea of cultivation of the body is reflected in the language that is used to talk about the body. As previously mentioned, most of the language that is used to talk about the body and organs are metaphorical; the metaphors used to describe the body are all similar thematically in that they are about climate and landscape. There are many botanical metaphors used to talk about the body because the body is viewed as something that can be cultivated like one would cultivate their plants in a garden.

The idea of cultivation is important to the idea of physical health because of how the body is healed. In biomedicine when one falls ill, he or she expects to walk into a doctor’s office and receive a prescription, usually a fast acting drug. In TCM, however, health is seen as more of a balance. The disharmonies cause things like qi to be blocked or, like previously mentioned, causing heat, cold, dryness, etc. of a certain organ. The goal of healing is not necessarily to cure the illness in the biomedical sense, but to return the body back to a balance. The body in TCM, thus, needs constant maintenance which is reflected in the frequency with which people visit practitioners. Just like a gardener needs to constantly tend to his or her plants we must constantly tend to our bodies to work towards staying healthy and in balance.

Before we discuss how nature metaphors are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is necessary to discuss another important idea in the philosophy of language in China which is

vagueness. Vagueness is an important tool in the writings of the Daoist author *Zhuangzi*. The writings of *Zhuangzi* are said to be notoriously hard to decipher because of their use of vagueness in terms of metaphors, allegory, irony, polysemy, and ambiguity. *Zhuangzi* sees language as something that is “open and unsettled”; since language is unsettled it is able to be used in innovative ways (Coutinho 6). In both the West and in China, philosophers and writers strove to accurately communicate with their audience. We can see that the notion of communication itself differs in the West and in China because of China’s lack of metaphysics. In Frege’s theory of meaning, words or signs align with senses which are metaphysical ideas so it is understandable that philosophers and writers want words to align most accurately with their sense. In China, there is only one plane of existence, which is constantly changing, so words can be unsettled and used in novel ways easily and uncontroversially; vagueness and metaphor are used by authors and philosophers to give his or her audience the most accurate idea of what he or she means despite the words themselves. *Zhuangzi* uses language in a malleable way which allows him to tell parables using extensive metaphors but still convey a clear message to the reader.

By looking at the use of language in the texts of *Zhuangzi* we can see that metaphorical language is important in other schools of thought in China in addition to Traditional Chinese Medicine. We can see the influence of both the metaphorical language used in the early Daoist texts by *Zhuangzi* as well as the use of botanical metaphors in Traditional Chinese Medicine in Ted Kaptchuk’s *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*; this book is an introductory text on modern TCM rather than TCM in a historical context. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the body is seen as a landscape replete with rivers and a climate; the body functions like the natural world in part because the lack of a metaphysical means the body exists

within and can be influenced by the natural world. This is not to say, however, that metaphors are not used in the West; while metaphor is not used to convey precise mental images like in China, it is still important in the arts. This being said, metaphors are used in biomedicine. Understanding the body's anatomy is often referred to as mapping the body; knowing illness means knowing the organs and being able to locate them, like one would find on a map, finding a lesion on that organ, and then treating that lesion. Additionally, we use metaphors in the West to talk about illness; these are often sports or war metaphors in which a sick person is described as fighting and winning or losing the battle against an illness. The differences in the types of metaphors used to talk about the body in the West and in China can be linked to the different fundamental understandings of the human body. It is clear that botanical and weather metaphors are in close connection with the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation.

The most overt use of nature metaphors in TCM is seen in Kaptchuk's discussion of illnesses or disharmonies; disharmonies are caused by "pernicious influences" that effect the body when the body is weakened by an imbalance of Yin and Yang (Mehrab). All of the pernicious influences discussed here are external influences because they are thought of as a natural event that invades the body from the outside. Some of the causes of disharmonies include dampness, wind, cold, heat, and dryness. Dampness is described as wet, heavy, and slow; it can cause limb heaviness or stiffness. Wind is quick, light, and dry; symptoms of wind disharmonies include dizziness, tinnitus, tremors, or convulsions. Cold is slow and contracts things; it is associated with the kidneys and some cold disharmonies have symptoms including fever and chills. Someone with a heat disharmony will be physically hot or feel hot; symptoms of heat disharmonies include high fever, red eyes and face, and a dry tongue. Dryness is accompanied by dry nostrils, lips, tongue, cracked skin, and dry stools. It is important to see that

these nature metaphors include both metaphorical implications of the body as well as physical symptoms. In the West we would not think twice about fever and chills being associated with an illness but we would probably find it strange to hear of an illness being “quick” or “light”.

One of the most significant disharmonies in Traditional Chinese Medicine is Wind; it is important to keep in mind the idea of “organismic process” in which the cosmos are thought of as being a whole. Extensive nature metaphors of this kind are understandable because, in addition to the notion of cultivation of the body, the body is seen as something that exists within nature; in this way, the weather patterns of nature can have an influence on the body. When a person is exposed to wind (as a pernicious influence) in certain circumstances like when he or she is sleeping or when his or her Yin or Yang is imbalanced, he or she will exhibit wind disharmony patterns. Wind disharmonies occur in the Spring and other disharmonies occur in other seasons because of how the nature event is correlated with the seasons; for example, cold disharmonies occur in the Winter, heat disharmonies occur in the Summer, dampness disharmonies occur in the late Summer, and dryness disharmonies occur in the Fall. Wind disharmonies are thought of as diseases that spread from one to another easily because they are carried by the wind. Wind causes movement disorders such as dizziness, tremors, and muscle spasms.

While I attribute the use of nature metaphors to the importance of the overlying ideal of self-cultivation in Confucianism, we can also examine another theory about metaphors in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Kuriyama brings up an interesting question: “how figurative is the metaphorical language?” If the body is seen as something that exists in nature and can be cultivated like a plant, the metaphor is more literal in China than it appears to us in the West. In the West, scholars historically had many problems with the language that was used to describe

mo like rough, choppy, and slippery. It is only when we understand that mo is perceived of as a river that we can see how the metaphor makes sense. Again, this metaphor is more literal than figurative to a practitioner of TCM who understands that what he or she is feeling is flowing when palpating mo. We can also see the literalness in the metaphor for Wind disharmonies. Wind disharmonies are said to have a sudden onset like a gust of wind. As mentioned previously, Wind disharmonies (in biomedical terms) are movement disorders; wind is said to have constant movement, it is flowing and changing without a fixed effect which is why such disorders are attributed to wind. We can see that the use of metaphors in TCM is linked to notions of what the body itself is but also how the body and humanity is understood in the larger cosmology as evidenced in the teachings of Confucius.

Conclusion:

The goal of this discussion was to show that there is a connection between language and perception. Historically, this link was thought to be not only one that is necessarily causal (i.e. language determines how we think) but also one that limits what one is able to think based on his or her language. In this paper I have discussed three levels of language to see what the link between language and perception is on each one. I have also researched various frameworks to try to explain this link. Through my research, I found that in this enigmatic nexus between language and perception exists practice. In each level of this paper we can see that language works with practice to shape perception.

In Part I, I discussed the connection between language and perception on the level of lexemes. The main portion of this discussion was trying to answer why biomedical doctors and Traditional Chinese Medicine physicians are able to feel the body differently and learn different

things about each individual's body by palpating at the wrist. The difference in perception lies in language and the mental images that are connected to each lexeme. This explanation only takes us so far as explaining how there is a difference in perception, it does not explain how Westerners (who only are trained in pulse taking) are able to learn to palpate mo in learning how to practice TCM; in other words it describes only a causal relationship and not how language is not limiting to one's perception. Just by learning the word mo and understanding that mo is thought of like flowing rivers, a Westerner is not automatically able to perceive everything a TCM practitioner is able to when they palpate mo. It is only when one pairs knowledge of language and mental image with the actual practice of palpating mo that he or she is able to cultivate his or her perception in one way or another. Here, we can see that it is not language alone that shapes perception, it is language paired with its respective practice. The idea of practice at the level of lexemes can be seen in conjunction with Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as use. If we adopt Wittgenstein's framework for meaning, language can not be a limiting factor in one's perception. If one is able to learn the use or the practice, knowing the language essentially becomes irrelevant. If one learns just the language, they need to bolster that knowledge with the knowledge learned from use to cultivate his or her perception

In Part II, I discussed how the structure of language can have an influence on one's thought process. By examining the structure of traditional Chinese grammar that is used in some philosophical texts, one who is only exposed to Western syntax is able to understand transformation in a way that is different from how he or she would typically understand it through his or her own grammar. It is easier to understand at this level how are perception can be affected by language. Once the syntax and subsequently the thought process behind understanding transformation is explained, it can be understood by someone who has not been

exposed to those before. At the level of syntax practice is at work but in a somewhat different way than at the level of lexemes. At this level, practice comes more from training your mind whereas at the level of lexemes one has to train their mind as well as their touch to be able to physically experience and perceive the human body in a different way. By training one's mind or thought process in terms of syntax, he or she is able to perceive the body differently because of how he or she understands the body as one of transformations and understands disease in a novel way.

Practice in this way is also what allows the relationship between language and perception to be non-causal and non-limiting. Clearly just by learning the words about the body in TCM I am not able to automatically have all of this new knowledge about the body that I did not when I only spoke English; it takes practice and training to learn those new categories. Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics framework suggests the need for practice in terms of adopting a new cultural schema; this framework is especially important because of his dynamic take on what 'culture' means. Language, in this framework functions as a space where speakers construct meaning; language can function as the link between practice and perception where meanings and experiences become encoded. These cultural conceptions that become encoded in speakers mind are enacted when they speak but that is not to say that they are unable to learn new ones; in some cases, these new cultural conceptions may be enacted more frequently and quickly than the old ones based on context or just lack of practice.

In both Parts I and II, while we can see that the link is not necessarily causal, much of the evidence for the link between language and perception appears causal; in Part II, however, we can see how perception influences language. In this section, I discussed the philosophical implications of language. In the West language was viewed as a tool to reach the metaphysical.

In a similar way, Greek medicine used autopsy to view the metaphysical through the human body as the human body was viewed as the most ideal being. Both language and the human body are perceived in a similar way without any obvious causal link. In China, the link between language and perception works in a way that suggests that how humanity is perceived influences language. Humans are thought of as beings that can be cultivated. If we can cultivate our minds, as Confucius suggests, we must also be able to cultivate our bodies; the fact that humans are thought of as beings to be cultivated leads to the nature metaphors used in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Additionally, the fact that humans are thought of existing within nature allow for weather metaphors.

In conclusion, the discussion of the nexus between language and perception needs to be bridged with something deeper, that is, practice. Practice allows language to shape our perception in the first place; we acquire our first language (or multiple languages in some cases) and the practices that are associated with it be pulse taking, palpation of mo, perceiving transformation, or not perceiving of it. Once we investigate practice further, we see how language's effect on perception is not limiting like some early linguistic theories proposed. By learning new languages and the practices associated with them we are able to perceive the world in new ways; when we learn the language we can learn new worldviews. Finally, we can also use practice, in addition to language and perception to understand how language's influence on perception is not necessarily causal. This discussion has demonstrated that the perception of the world as well as how humanity's place in the world is conceived has an influence on our language in terms of the kind of language we use to talk about our bodies. By investigating the nexus between language and perception we can see that the bridge that connects these two is practice. It is only through practice that the intangible language comes in contact in a

meaningful way with the tangible reality creating perception and experience for people.

Investigating the nexus between language and perception opens one to realize how he or she can open one's worldview through practice and incorporate other valid meaningful ideas and schemas in his or her life.

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