# Reading Between the Lines: An Intercultural Pragmanalysis of *Icarus*
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## 1. Introduction
### 1.1 Fogel's *Icarus*

According to the Russian Sports Minister, Bryan Fogel's exposé of the largest scandal in sports history was awarded an Oscar in the wrong category. "It's a good fantasy film and maybe deserves an award, but not as a documentary," he added, saying that it was "a shame that such a respected organization as the American film academy mixed up the genres (qtd. Blake, 2018). While this comment is highly indicative of the political attitudes spewed back and forth by the United States and Russia, the Minister's comment also illustrates *Icarus*'s transcending, global impression.

Following *Icarus's* premiere at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival, Netflix (outbidding Amazon and Sony Pictures) snagged the non-fiction film for only five million dollars (Lang & Setoodeh, 2017). Streaming in 190 countries, *Icarus* quickly accumulated critical acclaim from all over the world and, consequently, the film reigned supreme at the 90th Academy Awards ceremony as Best Documentary Feature.

An aspiring cyclist, Fogel, begins his film chronicling athletic doping with an approach similar to the famed documentary *Super-Size Me* – swapping Big Macs for intravenous anabolic injections to the buttocks (Gilbert, 2017). Fogel enlists Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, Director of the Moscow Anti-Doping laboratory, to supervise his steroid regimen. Intended to be a commentary on the pervasive practice of doping in sports, the original plot is superseded by what Fogel stumbles upon about a quarter of the way into production. Between regular Skype calls with the often-shirtless scientist, it becomes increasingly apparent to Fogel that Rodchenkov is at the epicenter of a brewing maelstrom.

Captured in Fogel's film, the unraveling state-sponsored doping scandal derails it from its original route and towards a thrilling new direction – gripping its audience, the International Olympic Committee, the World Anti-Doping Association, and major stakeholders. Critics of the film regard Rodchenkov as a documentary filmmaker's dream come true:

he is a charming crook with a questionable moral compass that paradoxically makes audiences fall in love with him. Rodchenkov was recruited to ensure a high gold medal count and administer his signature three-drug cocktail to a range of Olympic athletes. (Ruiz & Schwirtz, 2016). As the story spirals out of control, two of Rodchenkov's colleagues and close friends, with no priors of heart disease, die of mysterious cardiac arrests within weeks of each other (Schmidle, 2018). It is his budding friendship with Fogel that ends up saving Rodchenkov's life as Fogel smuggles him out of the "Empire of Evil" and into the holy land: Los Angeles (Rodchenkov in Fogel, 2017). Currently living under Witness Protection, Rodchenkov has undergone multiple plastic surgeries to elude Putin's wrath and discovery by Russian intelligence (Schmidle, 2018). Despite its original trajectory, *Icarus* transforms into a gripping tale of a courageous whistle-blower and the incredible lengths Russia has gone to ensure leadership in the Olympic Medal counts.

Acting as a nexus between sports and international relations, the Olympic Games are the ultimate political weapon, and no one wields it more effectively, or takes it more seriously, than what-was-then the Soviet Union and now Putin's Russian Federation.  Consider this quote by former Prime Minister Dimitriy Medvedev after the humiliating upset during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics:

> To us sport is more than sport, and that is why we are so affected by the performance of our team. In other countries people watched television, turned it off and relaxed, but we discussed and were agonized for a month: who delivered, who did not deliver, who is to blame, how should they be punished and so forth…it shows that we, as they say, excuse me for the pathos, in our spiritual constitution are a nation of winners.

Granted this nationalistic rhetoric is not exclusive to the Russian narrative; however, a brief look at the state's historic relationship to sport offers insight into the central tenets of its culture.

After historically contextualizing the controversy, the colossal doping scandal is not as shocking as one might have thought. In an interview Fogel explains that, "when you look at how Russian sport is set up, […] unlike the U.S., where it's all private, in Russia, it's actually controlled by the ministry, and all Russian athletes…are essentially being paid by the Russian government" (Charlie Rose Interview). In fact, victory

bonuses for Russian athletes are higher than anyone else's in the world: gold medal winners are said to receive 4 million rubles, approximately $125,000 (Khostunova, 2012). Once the USSR recognized the potential of sports as a means of control, the public sector centralized and consolidated all sports organizations and the Soviet propaganda machine began selling athleticism to its people (O'Mahony, 2006). The regime's effective control over the national athletic curricula allowed it to command the emerging sports culture, or *fizkultura*, as an agent of social change and as a weapon against the West.

Furthermore, the Communist regime regarded the Olympics as the perfect platform to establish international superiority and fulfill its political agenda (Phippen, 2016). The ice rinks housed the ideological proxy wars and Soviets were steadfast to prove the inferiority of the West. Russian national identity is historically characterized by its insistence on being recognized as a great power. This sentiment is captured in one of Putin's famous ultimatums: "Either Russia will be great, or it will not be at all" (qtd. in Petersson, 2013). Russian citizens across different ethnic sub-groups collectively subscribe to the cultural myth that their motherland is destined for international prestige (Duncan, 2005).

*Icarus* accidentally documents this culturally-indicative scandal and in this paper, I will argue that there is another serendipitous dimension to Fogel's film. When using an intercultural communicational lens, or an ethno-linguistic kaleidoscope, one can distill linguistic idiosyncrasies within Dr. Rodchenkov's and Fogel's dialogue. These areas of disconnect can then reveal loci of potential minor cultural clashes. The emerging friendship between Dr. Rodenchkov and Fogel mitigated culture clash, but their dialogue offers a convenient platform to pinpoint cultural differences via their language-in-use, or pragmatics. Certain keywords, indicative of their native cultural scripts, as well as pragmatic patterns illuminate cultural concepts. Although they are often subtle, if we locate these ethnolinguistic pixels we can put pressure on them in the hopes of sharpening our global vision. *Icarus* is an accessible platform by which linguists can analyze intercultural discourse and gain insight into how an individual's native cultural scripts might influence their habitual thoughts and even their perception of reality.

In this paper I will first provide information relevant to understanding how the cultural codification within a language influences

one's perception of reality. Next, I will introduce the field of cross-cultural pragmatics by heavily drawing upon Polish linguist Anna Weirzbicka's concepts. Then, I will expound the method that I plan to use to conduct an intercultural pragmanalysis of Rodchenkov's and Fogel's dialogue from *Icarus.* This analysis will allow me to isolate culturally significant key-words as well as culturally-indicative grammatical structures. As a bilingual researcher, I can access both cultural scripts and use my "native speaker intuition" to illuminate the nuanced cultural markers in the dialogue (Weirzbicka, 1991). Lastly, I will argue that this type of analytic approach to pop culture texts is conducive for a more comprehensive cross-cultural understanding of the other – especially in the context of today's globalized society, rife with political tensions.

## 2. Theoretical Framework
### 2.1 *Linguistic Relativity*

The Linguistic Relativity Principle (LRP), better known as The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, states that "language has a non-negligible effect on cognition, combined with the claim that languages are non-trivially different" (Zlatev & Blomberg, 2015). This basically means that there are significant, culturally-indicative, differences between various languages and, beyond this, an individual's native tongue influences their thinking. This idea was first expressed by 19th-century German thinker, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who saw language as the expression of the "spirit of a nation" (Zlatev & Blomberg, 2015). American anthropologist Sapir expanded on this idea and posited that languages act as symbolic guides to culture and contain the key to understanding worldviews. (Lucy, J. A. 1997; Wierzbicka 1997). According to Humboldt and Sapir, all lexicons contain concepts and grammatical features which are so tightly woven into the individuality of a given language that they cannot be wholly transferred into other languages (Wierzbicka, 1991).

If each lexicon is imbued with a unique cultural matrix then it can be argued that no words or constructions of one language can have absolute equivalents in another. That said, the existence of perfect cross-translations is a hotly contested issue within the linguistic community (Lucy, J. A. 1997). Vigorous opponents of the LRP purport the existence of a Universal Grammar: an innate, underlying structure to all language. This universalist school argues that differences between specific languages are "surface phenomena" that do not affect the brain's cognitive processes (see

Chomsky and Pinker). On the other side of the spectrum, relativist scholars insist on acknowledging the cultural influences on perception and encourage a more "ethnographical approach" to exploring "language-in-use" (Hymes 1964). While universalism dominated the field of American linguistics from the 1960s through the 1980s, relativists maintain that it is extremely difficult to detangle cultural threads from their respective lexicons and therefore there is a need for a sub-field of linguistics to address cultural influence.

## 2.2 *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*

The term 'cross-cultural' includes any communication between two people who do not share a common linguistic or cultural background (Tannen, 1984). Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deals with "language-in-use", or simply the socio-cultural use of language (Yule, 1996). While some pragmatic elements are considered universal, the field of cross-cultural pragmatics mostly focuses on pragmatic elements specific to a certain language or culture. Anna Wierzbicka's book, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*, offers a concise overview of the cross-cultural pragmatic field's main convictions: (1) differences between various languages and communicative styles are profound and systematic; (2) they reflect cultural values or at least different hierarchies of values and lastly; (3) they can be explained and made sense of in terms of independently established but different cultural values and cultural priorities (page 69).

In another one of her books, *Understanding Culture Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*, Wierzbicka coined the term "cultural scripts" in reference to "tacit norms, values, and practices widely shared, and widely known (on an intuitive level) in a given society" (Wierzbicka, 1991). A native language does not wholly determine worldviews; however, every large community has distinctive habitual modes of thinking that become entrenched in language and in turn influence habitual cognition (Wierzbicka, 1997). Over generations, cultures accumulate and perpetuate particular "conceptual tools" that are imbued into the lexicon and manifest into "key-words." These key-words are often distorted via translation from one lexicon into another because the attached cultural connotations rarely have equivalents outside their respective frames of reference.

When a speaker's pragmatic patterns, indicative of their native language, emerge whilst speaking a second language it is known as "pragmatic transfer" (Kasper, 1992). This pragmatic transfer can be seen in the form of cultural keywords or even grammatical structures indicative of one's native language. Weirzbicka put it best when she said, "there is no such thing as 'grammatical meaning' or 'lexical meaning'. There are only lexical and grammatical means of conveying meaning — and even here no sharp line can be drawn between the two" (Weirzbicka, 1991). Pragmatic transfer can either be positive or negative. When pragmatic conventions are shared between two languages and the transfer does not constitute an area of potential misunderstanding, this is called positive pragmatic transfer. In contrast, negative pragmatic transfer occurs when pragmatic conventions differ between the two languages and native speakers attempt to translate cultural keywords, integral to their original cultural scripts, into their second language. The term 'pragmatic failure' illustrates an area of cross-cultural communication breakdown that occurs when an individual misunderstands "what is meant by what is said" (Thomas, 1983). Pragmatic knowledge from the first language, either in the form of cultural keywords or grammatical structure, often exerts influence on the use of a second language.

While 'cross-cultural pragmatics' and 'intercultural pragmatics' are used interchangeably in literature, there is a slight distinction to be made: 'cross-cultural pragmatics' is the umbrella term for discussing the linguistic phenomena relating to cultural differences, and 'intercultural pragmatics' is saved for when data is obtained when individuals from different cultural groups interact with one another. Furthermore, intercultural pragmatic research is often categorized into two different approaches: micro- and macro- (Keskes, 2013). While the macro-perspective focuses on establishing linguistic expectations amongst cultures, the micro-perspective focuses on interactions between individuals, and the culture underlying those interactions.

## 3. Method of Analysis
### 3.1 *Intercultural Pragmanalysis*
In this study, I borrow heavily from Wierzbicka's handbooks and conduct a micro-level intercultural pragmanalysis of the unscripted dialogue between Rodchenkov (R) and Fogel (F) from *Icarus*. My main focus is to underline instances of pragmatic transfers by Rodchenkov from

Russian to English that can potentially lead to pragmafailure, or a misunderstanding of what is said versus what is actually meant (Thomas, 1983). When native language pragmatics percolate into the second language it is sometimes too subtle to recognize; however, given my agency as a Russian native speaker, I have access to both cultural scripts and am therefore able to better pinpoint these areas. After transcribing the majority of the documentary, I localized culturally-imbued words that are integral players in the Russian cultural script and not transparent from an American frame of reference. Additionally, to conduct a more holistic pragmanalysis, I also shed light on grammatical structures indicative of the Russian lexicon. For the purposes of this paper I chose four examples and focus predominantly on the pragmatic transfers within Rodchenkov's speech. Arranged in chronological order, these examples illustrate that native pragmatics, keywords and grammatical structures, are culturally indicative and influence people's habitual modes of thought and perceptions of reality. I underline the pragmatic transfers in each example and subsequently elaborate on these areas of interest.

3. 3 *The Data*
**(1)** *32:07*
**F:** The race is tomorrow, I don't know, hopefully ...
**R:** Bryan, I am now like a <u>priest</u>. I __ healing your doping paranoia. You are <u>free</u>. You have enough <u>power</u>, and <u>God</u> is with you. You are <u>sentenced to win</u>.

　　　This above example is dialogue sourced prior to Fogel's first cycling race of the film. The entire first quarter of the film documents his steroid regimen in preparation for this race. Perceiving uncertainty on Fogel's end, Rodchenkov offers him a quintessentially-Russian pep talk. Linguists often synthesize a part of their pragmatic research of the Russian national character on an assessment of traditional proverbs. A substantial amount of these culturally-indicative phrases reflects a strong sense of religiosity (Kozlova, 2017). In fact, as evidenced by the aforementioned example, when a Russian speaker seeks to express encouragement it is not uncommon for them to draw upon their faith. Whereas in English, a pep talk indicative of Anglo-Saxon individualistic values would most likely emphasize the addressee's personal achievement and their capability to get through whatever obstacle lies ahead.

Instead, Rodchenkov encourages Fogel by saying he is <u>sentenced to win</u>. The use of the word "sentenced" implies that Fogel is predestined for victory. This word association goes hand in hand with the concept of *sudba* which is inherently pervasive in the Russian cultural script. It is roughly translated to destiny and fate, but these concepts are not exactly synonymous with each other. There is a characteristically Russian preoccupation with *sudba*, a predestined path for people that is not influenced by the subjectivity of an individual.

Russian syntax often acknowledges the limitations of human knowledge and in contrast, English syntax expresses a tendency towards "sober empiricism." The subjectivity of the individual is further minimized in grammatical structures and Russian is considered to be a "non-agentive" language in comparison to English. In example (1) we can see that Rodchenkov does not say the word "am" after "I". This is because if one were to say this same phrase in Russian there is no equivalent to "am" and instead it would be:

<div align="center">

*Ya escelayu tvouy dopengovyu paranoiuy.*
***I   heal (imperfective form) your doping paranoia.***

</div>

This communicative feature is arguably representative of the culture. Russian has many impersonal dative infinitive constructions that express non-agentive actions. While the English nominative construction shifts a part of responsibility for success or failure onto the person being addressed, the Russian dative construction completely exempts the subject from any liability for the end result (Kozlova, 2017). English syntax places more attention on causal relationships while Russian grammar constructions focus on the interplay between human life and the forces of nature. Thus, a pragmatic analysis of grammar cases provides valuable insight into the common ways of thinking that are characteristic of the two differing given speech community.

Anglo-Saxon traditionally places special emphasis on the rights and on the autonomy of every individual (Weirzbicka, 1997). Freedom is considered to be an Anglo-Saxon keyword in the English cultural script. In America, the word free is imbued with cultural significance associated with the democratic creed that underpins nation (Weirzbicka, 1997). While Rodchenkov uses the word <u>free</u>, I posit that he is referencing the Russian cultural concept*, svoboda*, and not the quintessentially American one. While *Svoboda* is often roughly translated into "freedom", connotations of

"boundless space" or a "expandable space in which one can fully stretch" are attached to *svoboda* and not "freedom". In the Russian sense, <u>free</u> concentrates less on the individual and more the influence of the surrounding environment. The cultural idea enshrined in the Russian concept of svoboda suggests the image of some oppressive "straitjacket" being loosened, so that one's chest can fully expand (Weirzbicka, 1997). Unlike freedom, *svoboda* is associated with an "exhilarating sense of well-being" caused by the perceived absence of some external pressure. These incongruent cultural understandings of the concept of freedom between Russian and English are still close enough that Rodchenkov's statement makes sense in both languages, therefore there is no pragmatic failure, or communicational breakdown. That said, it is still helpful to point out the Rodchenkov most likely meant <u>free</u> in the Russian pragmatic sense of the word rather than the English one.

**(2)** *36:18*
**R:** Just stay optimistic. Because now we <u>cannot change nothing</u>.
**F:** I mean I felt pretty good but
**R:** No, no no. Bryan, <u>look at me, stop it</u>. <u>You are what you are. I am what I am</u>. It's a turning point what we are doing. <u>Be happy</u> that we have such fantastic material. You have ten times more information than Dick Pound and Lance Armstrong together.
**F:** Really?
**R:** We will continue, don't worry. <u>You are just like in a reception. You did not enter the first floor. There is a second and so on.</u>
**F:** What's on the second floor?
**R:** When you go to Moscow you will see.

In this second example, we see Rodchenkov giving Fogel multiple, short orders through. Normally, Russian directives are expressed in a straight-forward manner via "bare" imperatives (p. 44). On the other hand, English speakers tend to "dress their commands" in a form which offers an illusion of options (p. 45). Anglo Saxon cultural traditionally places special emphasis on the rights and on the autonomy of every individual, thus there are heavy restrictions on the use of the imperatives in English and speakers often pair them with the interrogative and conditional forms. In Russian, bare imperatives are a pervasive communicative structure and Weirzbicka posits that this explained via the cultural concept: *iskrennost* (roughly

sincerity/frankness/spontaneity). *Iskrennost* encourages people to share what they truly think, make frank critical remarks, and implement bare imperatives in their speech. Thus, what English speakers may perceive as too blunt, Russians perceive as genuine. Given this information, it is plausible that when Russian pragmatics are transferred into English the bare imperatives may translate into arrogance (Weirzbicka, 2002). This concept of *iskrennost* permeates throughout the whole Russian lexicon and cultural characteristics and is a potential locus of cultural clash as Americans may perceive these bare imperatives as rude. This "cultural clash" is innocuous in Fogel and Rodchenkov's scenario as the two of them have built a substantial friendship by this point and Fogel knows that Rodchenkov is well-intentioned; however, it is beneficial to acknowledge this potential culture clash.

Another case of negative pragmatic transfer from Russian grammar to English is exhibited in the underlined phrase: we <u>cannot change nothing.</u> In Russian, this statement would go something like this:

*Me ne mozhem necheevo pomenat.*
**We not able nothing change.**

Double negation is a communicative structure embedded in the Russian way of speaking and constitutes a common problem for Russian speakers, such as Rodchenkov, because their native pragmatics seep into their second language. In English, double negation transforms the phrase into a positive clause, whereas in Russian it is actually a way to intensify the negative. Rodchenkov uses his native pragmatics to intensify the idea of an inevitable fate. The idea that nothing can be changed, and that <u>you are what you are</u> also closely coincides with the cultural concept of *sudba* (see example 1).

In the last underlined portion of the example, Rodchenkov uses a metaphor to compare the stages of Fogel's journey to levels in a building. Fogel has yet to reach the first and second floors and Rodchenkov is telling him he must remain patient. "Boundless patience, [and the] surprising ability to stand difficulties" are characteristic of and permeate through Russian culture via proverbs and ancient folklore (Kozlova, 2017). This second example exhibits the pragmatic transfer of double negation, bare imperatives, and the cultural concepts of fate and patience.

**(3)** *1:22:40*

**R:** There is a top-level decision. You know who I mean. And big boss, Vladimir Putin, saying, "We have to show the best result in Sochi, we must show the others who we are."

We could make team clean in Sochi. One month. But it was decided to use PEDs during Sochi.

**F:** Through the competition so they could be at their very top level?

**R:** Right, right.

**R:** This was named Operation Sochi <u>Resultat</u>. In Russian, "resultat" means "to achieve positive results."

  In this third example Rodchenkov actually provides Fogel with a sneak peek into the Russian cultural script. He mitigates the negative pragmatic transfer of the word <u>resultat</u> by complementing it with a cultural definition. *Resultat* does not exactly equate to the, arguably neutral, English equivalent "result". The cultural nuance attached to it signals that the given outcomes must be positive; so, logically if the outcome is negative then it is not the final *resultat* yet. Weirzbicka maintains that a common symptom of cultural keywords is that, upon translation into another language, their cultural connotations are lost. While Weirzbicka has not branded the word *resultat* as a cultural keyword in her book, I argue that this word is culturally significant because it has an attached connotation that illuminates another central tenet of Russian culture: the sense of pride and honor. Within the Russian lexicon, pragmatics are constructed and "tailored in a certain way to minimize any humiliation, shame or failure" (Wierzbicka, 1991). This word *resultat* complements the Russian cultural myth of *Smuta*. Literally translating to "foggy or unclear" in English, *Smuta* refers to the 'Times of Trouble' -- a period of famine and occupation from the years 1598 to 1613 (Petersson, 2013). In modern times it is still associated with "trauma and shame from recurring periods of weakness." That said, by overcoming these periods of weakness the nation cements its destiny for greatness. Obstacles are simply reminders that Russia has not fulfilled its natural destiny yet. This third example exhibits the negative pragmatic transfer of a plausible cultural keyword; however, pragmatic failure was avoided because Rodchenkov pre-emptively contextualized the concept.

**(4)** *1:54:00*
**R:** To understand the word doublethink involves the word doublethink. I was doing parallel two things which canceled out each other in being fully contradictory. Doping and anti-doping. It was <u>pure, exact</u> doublethink.

To someone outside of the Russian cultural frame of reference, the words <u>pure</u> and <u>exact</u> do not express any concept of great significance and may even seem redundant. This may be because he is trying to express a Russian cultural keyword in English. Weirzbicka concedes that one can almost always find a way to translate cultural keyword via circumlocution and contextualization; however, she argues that this can only by using longer, more cumbersome expressions than those which we can use relying on the habitual ways of speaking offered to us by our native language (Weirzbicka, 1997). In this last example, Rodchenkov uses two words <u>pure</u> and <u>exact</u> to translate one word in Russian that is considered to be a cultural key word *istina* (Weirzbicka, 2004). *Istina* does not merely refer to "truth"; rather, it alludes to the existence of "the ultimate truth," "the hidden truth," or even <u>pure, exact</u> truth. Russian culture is preoccupied with the concept of an underlying truth. While much of "English morality is essentially about fair play. Russians strive for Absolute Truth" (Kozlova, 2017).

## 4. Concluding Remarks

An intercultural pragmanalysis made it increasingly evident that one's native tongue lays down the framework for habitual linguistic patterns. Rodchenkov's translational slip-ups reflect how his native language pragmatics seep into his second language. After teasing out conceptual clues hidden within the Russian lexicon, it is possible to infer that the structure of the Russian language representative of the central tenets of Russian culture. Russians believe in the existence of an Absolute truth, specifically one that accounts for the nation's predestination for greatness. This concept emerges via not only cultural key-words but also through various communicative structures. The *sudba* of Russia is not subject to individual agency; instead, it is a collective subscription to this cultural myth that perpetuates the concept of predestined greatness. The Olympic Games act as a platform for Russia to showcase its destiny for international prestige and if the results are not great, then it has not yet reached the *resultat*.

*4.1 Addressing Reflexivity*

While research in this field remains largely speculative, Weirzbicka purports that no one is more qualified to make generalizations than "linguistic migrants" that inhabit both cultural spheres and rely on their native speaker intuition (Weirzbicka, 1991). Growing up in a Russian bilingual household, I am able to more easily recognize areas of negative pragmatic transfers. When I switch linguistic registers, the grids lines through which I dissect the world around me shift. I must consider what one language obligates from me relative to the other.

4.2 *Larger Implications and the Future*

The tendency to assess all languages using the same rubric is extremely counterproductive to achieving cross-cultural understanding because it neglects the cultural nuances unique to each language. If various languages codify concepts differently, then it is logical to assume that each language generates subtly different interpretations of reality. The Oscar-winning documentary *Icarus* is a surprisingly fruitful platform to extract significant cross-cultural insight. In a multiethnic country like the United States, cross-cultural pragmatics are not exclusively relevant to academia; instead, they bear immense practical significance. America is an arena of potential culture clashes between immigrants and the Anglo-Saxon population. While these clashes cannot be completely avoided they can be mitigated through multicultural education.

In his Oscar acceptance speech, Fogel expressed his "hope [that] *Icaru*s is a wake-up call — yes, about Russia, but more than that, about the importance of telling the truth, now more than ever." In an era of alternative facts, a singular truth remains elusive. Living in a postmodern society affords people a plurality of truths which makes it even harder to distinguish what is "real" from what is not. We use language to compartmentalize our perceptions of reality and given the inherent differences amongst cultures it would naïve to believe in the existence of a singular universal truth. While I agree that telling the truth is always a great take-away message, the truth is susceptible to cultural subjectivity.

The upside however is that this subjectivity, or linguistic relativity, can be momentarily tamed by using a cross-cultural pragmatic lens. I argue that this type of analysis should be conducted in more areas and more frequently as there is a lack of literature on the practical applications of the LRP and ethno-pragmatics (Goddard & Weirzbicka, 2004). The culturally-

indicative differences between languages offer us insight into which truths one culture holds to be "self-evident" relative to another. This paper does not argue that native languages constrain the concepts that one can possibly grasp, it acknowledges the role that habitual thought plays in terms of understanding ourselves and the other.

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