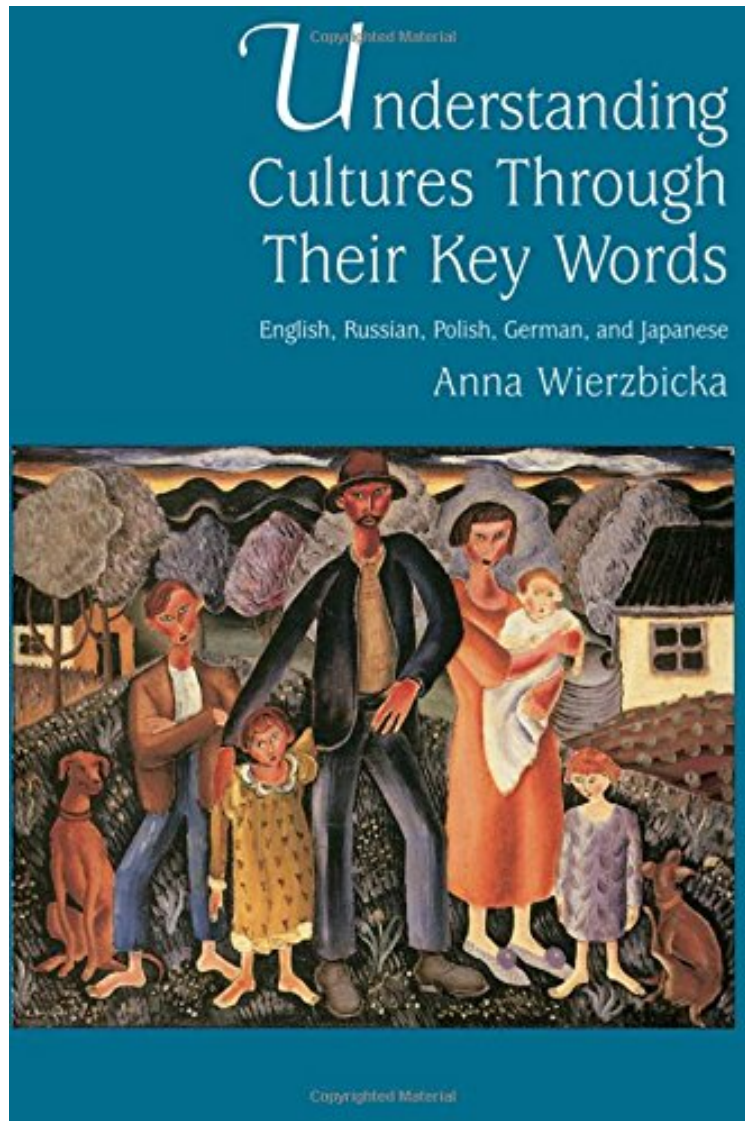


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Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese (Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics)

Anna Wierzbicka

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Anna Wierzbicka : Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese (Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it

would be worth my time, and all praised *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics):

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Perhaps the book would have been better if focused on a single culture.
By Sunshine
Perhaps the book would have been better if focused on a single culture. As it is, the analysis of so few words leads to plausible conclusions, but not probable conclusions. Overall I thought it was fine until I showed the book to a Russian native and she told me the word use and translation was archaic.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Very useful if you're willing to work at it...
By Qesher
I read this and used this book over a decade ago, but it got lost-in-the-exhaust of moving around the country. I am delighted it is available here. As a bona fide linguist, I view this work as a practical exposition of pragmatics, register, and as a springboard for further anthropological linguistic study. Do consider giving this a try, won't you?
21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating stuff.
By A Customer
Contrary to the previous reviewer's opinion, I found this book fascinating. I don't have a Ph.D. in linguistics either. Her claim is *not* that one cannot understand the key words of a culture without being immersed in the culture, only that one cannot understand the key words of a culture by means of simplistic translations or definitions. She attempts to provide careful and precise definitions, given in what she calls the "Natural Semantic Metalanguage" -- an extremely restricted vocabulary consisting of words that, as far as she has been able to tell via research, have equivalents in every natural language. I don't buy all of her "Natural Semantic Metalanguage" theories (for which see her other book *Semantics: Primes and Universals*) but it sure is a useful tool for the job she's doing here.

This book develops the dual themes that languages can differ widely in their vocabularies, and are also sensitive indices to the cultures to which they belong. Wierzbicka seeks to demonstrate that every language has "key concepts," expressed in "key words," which reflect the core values of a given culture. She shows that cultures can be revealingly studied, compared, and explained to outsiders through their key concepts, and that the analytical framework necessary for this purpose is provided by the "natural semantic metalanguage," based on lexical universals, that the author and colleagues have developed on the basis of wide-ranging cross-linguistic investigations. Appealing to anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers as well as linguists, this book demonstrates that cultural patterns can be studied in a verifiable, rigorous, and non-speculative way, on the basis of empirical evidence and in a coherent theoretical framework.