

Course: LIN 421/521 Linguistic Anthropology
Semester: Spring 2009
Instructor: Jürgen Bohnemeyer
Text: Foley 1997

Overview: This course provides an introduction to linguistic anthropology, the study of the relation between language and culture. As a discipline, linguistic anthropology is at the intersection of cultural anthropology and linguistics. Linguistic anthropologists seek to understand language as an integral part of *culture* - the sum total of the knowledge and *practices* (socially shared habitual behavior) that an individual partakes in by virtue of being a member of a *community*. This perspective makes it possible for linguistic anthropologists to use linguistic evidence and methods of linguistics to illuminate the culture of the speech community and to bring cultural evidence and anthropological methods to bear on the study of those aspects of language that are culture-specific. Such culture-dependent traits pervade every part of language, from phonology and phonetics through morphology and syntax to semantics and pragmatics.

Linguistic anthropology has developed two broad themes, each branching off into numerous different lines of inquiry. **Cognitive anthropology** focuses on the meanings expressed by the lexical items and grammatical constructions of a language, asking to what extent these reflect culture-specific conceptualizations of the speech community. For example, *ethnobotanists* and *ethnozoologists* study indigenous terminologies for life forms, seeking to determine what aspects of these vary from community to community, depending on the particular use of and significance attributed to a life form, and what aspects are shared across cultures, reflecting the shared biological and cognitive heritage of humankind. Similar research has targeted terminologies for color, kinship, emotions, tastes and smells, and so on. The most controversial idea in cognitive anthropology is the **Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis** - the hypothesis that the language habitually used by the members of a community may influence the way they memorize and conceptualize reality. The **ethnography of speaking** (or *ethnography of communication*), the other major sub-field within linguistic anthropology, examines culture-specific aspects of language use, viewing speaking itself as a cultural practice - from simple *speech acts* such as greetings and leave-takings via more complex "scripted" *speech events* (e.g., religious ceremonies, political speeches, court room proceedings) to the *ethno-poetic* study of verbal art and to culture-specific norms of linguistic politeness.

Goals: The course aims to familiarize students with some of the key ideas, methods, approaches, and findings within linguistic anthropology. At the end of this course, students should have a working understanding of these issues that is sufficient to allow them to determine, when confronted with a phenomenon in their future academic or non-academic practice, the basic questions a linguistic anthropologist might ask about this phenomenon and where to look for existing research that might have addressed the phenomenon. The general learning goal for this course is to properly understand the central ideas of linguistic anthropology. A partial list of the ideas discussed in the course is provided in the Appendix.

Classes: T/R 12:30-13:50 in 121 Baldy
Instructor: Dr. Jürgen Bohnemeyer – Office 642 Baldy Phone 645-0127
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Coursework:

- Reading assignments and reading comprehension questions - there'll be a reading assignment from the textbook in preparation of each class. To make sure that students indeed read these before class, they are required to write up one (421) or two (521) questions about each reading on a sheet of paper with their name on it. These questions will be collected in the beginning of class. The questions must concern the content of the particular reading, and they must be genuine questions the student has when trying to understand the particular reading and thinking about the implications of the points made there. Both the number and the quality (in terms of thoughtfulness/incisiveness) of the questions submitted count towards the participation grade.¹
- Three homework assignments, each involving a multi-week project. The first project involves the analysis of an American English discourse. For the second and third assignments, students collect and analyze data from a language other than their native language. Students are given two weeks for the completion of the first project and three weeks each for that of the remaining two projects.
- A take-home final exam, consisting of a set of questions to be answered in single-paragraph essays (e.g., "What generalizations emerged from Berlin & Kay's 1969 study of Basic Color Terms"?). The exam will be assigned in the final week of classes and must be completed within two weeks. Students may elect to write a short (maximally 10 pages) term paper in lieu of the final exam. The topic of the paper must be accepted by the instructor at least three weeks in advance of submission. In 421 (undergrads), students may also present one of the primary readings on the syllabus (see below).
- Lit review presentations: Students may present a summary of one of the primary readings on the syllabus in class during the lecture for which the reading is listed. Presentations should be 10-20 minutes long and must include a handout. Undergraduates may do a lit review presentation in lieu of the final exam; grad students may do one in lieu of a homework assignment or to improve their assignment grade.

Assessment: Participation (determined largely, but not exclusively, by the reading comprehension questions), the three homework assignments, and the final exam each count for 20% of the final grade.

Outline: Unless otherwise noted, reading assignments refer to the textbook, Foley 1997. All other readings will be downloadable from UBlerns (*) or from the online course reserve site of the UB Libraries (^). Syntax of the reading assignments:

- *a; b* – read *a* and *b*
- *a; (b)* – read *a* plus optionally *b*

¹ Students earn zero, one, or two points for questions on the reading assigned for a given class. To earn one point, they need to have one (421)/two (521) or more questions of the kind that the assigned reading might raise in a reader with their background (a background of having taken college-level classes in language-and/or-culture-related subject areas). To earn two points, the questions need to be thoughtful and incisive (i.e., not the kind of questions one might ask if one just opens the book in a random place and considers a random sentence in isolation). At the end of the course, everybody gets a grade based on their reading points: 30 or more for an A; 28 for an A-; 26 for a B+, and so on, and an F for 11 points or fewer. This means that in order to score an A on the reading questions, you need to submit *quality* questions for a majority of the classes, and in order to avoid getting an F, you need to make sure that you submit questions to more than one third of the classes. The reading questions grade will make for 75% of the participation grade, which in turn constitutes 20% of your overall grade.

- *a/b* – read *a* or *b*, depending on which one was selected for discussion in class (and read the other optionally in addition if you're interested)

Part	Week	Day	Topics	Reading	
1 – basic concepts and questions	1	1	Linguistic anthropology; culture, language, practice, meaning, network models of sociality; overview of the course	ch.1: 3-7, 11-12, 21-29; (29-40); (^Boas 1911; ^Goodenough 1957)	
		2	Mind, knowledge, representation, learning, innateness, cognitivism, enactionism	ch.1: 7-11, 12-21; (^Boas 1911; ^Goodenough 1957)	
	2	1	nature vs. nurture, universalism, relativism	*Levinson 2003; (*Duranti 1997: 1-9)	
		2	Identity, ideology, power, and language	*Bucholtz & Hall 2004	
2 – ethnography of communication	3	1	From speech acts to speech events	*Duranti 1997: 214-227, 288-290; (^Hymes 1972)	
		2	Speech events across cultures	ch.13; (*Duranti 1997: 290-294; ^Sherzer 1989)	
	*** First HW assignment out (due week 05 day 2) ***				
3 – language and identity	4	1	Network analysis of linguistic variation	ch. 16: 328-333; *Milroy 1987: ch.1; (^Milroy & Milroy 1992)	
		2	Variation and identity	Eckert 1988	
	5	1	Language and gender	ch.15; (*Kulick 2000; *Eckert 2002)	
4 – power, solidarity, and face	6	1	Politeness and face	ch.14: 260-273; (^Brown 2001; *Brown & Levinson 1987: 101-129)	
		2	Politeness across cultures	ch.14: 273-280; (^Matsumoto 1988; *Ishiyama in press; ^Keenan 1989)	
	*** Second HW assignment out (due week 10 day 2) ***				
5 – ideologies in multi-lingualism	7	1	Language choice and code switching	ch.16: 307-313, 333-343	
		2	Contact-induced change	ch.19: 381-392; (Jackson 1989; Gumperz & Wilson 1971)	
6 – ethno-semantic	8	1	Language shift and language death	ch.19: 395-397; *Dorian 1983: ch.3; ^Schmidt 1985	
		2	Universalism, relativism, and the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis	ch.10: 192-208; (ch.3: 81-84, 86-90; ch.8: 169-175)	
	9	1	Spring recess		
		2	Spring recess		
	10	1	Cognitive anthropology	ch.5: 106-115; (ch.4)	
		2	Ethnobiology	ch.5: 115-130; (^Berlin, Breedlove, & Raven 1974: ch.3; ^Berlin 1992: ch.1)	
	11	1	Kinship term systems	ch.6; (^Lounsbury 1964)	
*** Third HW assignment out (due week 14 day 1) ***					
12	2	Color terminologies	ch.7; (^Levinson 2000)		
		Whorf's ideas and the Neo-Whorfian paradigm	ch.10: 208-214; (^Kay & Kempton 1984; *Lucy 1992: 85-135)		
7 – linguistic relativity	13	1	Deep impact: Spatial frames of reference in language and cognition	ch.11: 215-225; (^Pederson <i>et al.</i> 1998)	
		2	Language between culture and cognition: the Levinson-Gleitman debate	*Majid <i>et al.</i> 2004; (*Li & Gleitman 2002; *Levinson <i>et al.</i> 2002)	

		2	Metaphors in language and thought	*Boroditsky 2001 (ch.9; *Gentner & Gentner 1983; *January & Kako 2007; *Boroditsky, Schmidt, & Phillips 2003)
	14	1	Thinking for speaking	^Slobin 1996; (*Belloro et al. 2008)
		2	Culture- and language-specificity in language acquisition	ch.11: 225-229; ^Bowerman & Choi 2003
8 – how we got here	15	1	Language socialization	ch.17
		*** Final out (due Tuesday May 5th) ***		
		2	Co-evolution of language, culture, and brain	ch.2; (^Deacon 1992)

Reading list

- Bauman, R. & J. Sherzer (Eds.) (1989). *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*. [2nd Edition!] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Belloro, V., J. Bohmeyer, D. Gentner, & K. Braun. (2008). Thinking-for-speaking: evidencia a partir de la codificación de disposiciones espaciales en español y yucateco [Thinking for speaking: Evidence from the encoding of spatial dispositions in Spanish and Yucatec]. *Memoria del IX Encuentro Internacional De Lingüística En El Noroeste. Vol. 2*. Hermosillo: Editorial UniSon. 175-190.
- Berlin, B. (1992). *Ethnobiological classification*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Berlin, B. Breedlove, D., and P. Raven (1974). *Principles of Tzeltal plant classification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Berlin, B. & P. Kay (1991). *Basic Color Terms*. [Paperback Edition! Reprinted 1999] Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Boas, F. (1911). Linguistics and ethnology. In F. Boas (Ed.), *Handbook of American Indian languages (BAE-B 40, Part I)*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution. 59-73. [Reprinted in Hymes (Ed.) 1964: 15-22.]
- Bohmeyer, J. (2000). Event order in language and cognition. In H. de Hoop & T. v. d. Wouden (Eds.), *Linguistics in the Netherlands 2000*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 1-16.
- Bonvillian, N. (1997). *Language, culture, and communication*. [2nd Edition!] Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Boroditsky, L. (2001). Does language shape thought? Mandarin and English speakers' conceptions of time. *Cognitive Psychology* 43: 1-22.
- Boroditsky, L., L. Schmidt, & W. Phillips. (2003). Sex, syntax, and semantics. In D. S. Gentner & Goldin-Meadow (eds.), *Language in Mind: Advances in the study of language and cognition*. 61-80.
- Boster, J. S. (1985). "Requiem for the omniscient informant": There's life in the old girl yet. In J. W. D. Dougherty (Ed.), *Directions in cognitive anthropology*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press. 177-197.
- Bourdieu, P.; B. Thompson (Ed.); G. Raymond (Translator); & M. Adamson (Translator) (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [Reproduced in excerpt in Jaworski & Coupland 1999: 502-513.]
- Bowerman, M. & S. Choi (2003). Space under construction: Spatial categorization in first language acquisition. In D. Gentner & S. Goldin-Meadow (Eds.), *Language in mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 387-427.
- Brown, P. (2001). Politeness and language. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences. Volume 17*. (Section Editor for Linguistics: B. Comrie). London: Elsevier. 11620-11624.
- Brown, P. & S. C. Levinson. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buchholtz, M. & K. Hall. (2004). Language and identity. In A. Duranti (ed.), *A companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 369-394.
- Clyne, M. (Ed.) (1985). *Australia, meeting place of languages*. Pacific Linguistics Series C No. 92. Canberra: Australian National University.

- Danziger, E. (2001). *Relatively speaking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deacon, T. W. (1992). Brain-language coevolution. In J. A. Hawkins & M. Gell-Mann (Eds.), *The evolution of human languages*. Redwood City, CA: Addison-Wesley. 21-48.
- Dennett, D. C. (1996). *Darwin's dangerous idea*. [Penguin Paperback Edition!] London: Penguin Books.
- Dorian, N. C. (1981). *Language death: The life cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eckert, P. (1988). Adolescent social structure and the spread of linguistic change. *Language in society* 17: 183-207.
- (2002). Demystifying sexuality and desire. In K. Campbell-Kibler, R. J. Podesva, S. J. Roberts & A. Wong (eds.), *Language and sexuality: Contesting meaning in theory and practice*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. 99-110.
- Foley, W. A. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Gentner, D. & D. R. Gentner. (1983). Flowing waters or teeming crowds: Mental models of electricity. In D. Gentner & A. L. Stevens (eds.), *Mental models*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 99-129.
- Goodenough, W. H. (1957). Cultural anthropology and linguistics. In P. L. Garvin (Ed.), *Report of the seventh annual round table meeting on linguistics and language study*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University. 167-173. [Reprinted in Hymes (Ed.) 1964: 36-39.]
- Gumperz, J. J. (1993). Culture and conversational inference. In W. A. Foley (Ed.), *The role of theory in language description*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 193-214.
- Gumperz, J. J. & S. C. Levinson (Eds.), *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press.
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- Hymes, D. (Ed.) (1964). *Language in culture and society*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
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- January, D. & E. Kako. (2007). Re-evaluation evidence for linguistic relativity: Reply to Boroditsky (2001). *Cognition* 104: 417-426.
- Jackson, J. (1989). Language identity of the Colombian Vaupés Indians. In Bauman & Sherzer (Eds.): 50-64.
- Jaworski, A. & N. Coupland (Eds.) (1999). *The discourse reader*. London: Routledge.
- Kay, P. & Kempton, W. (1984). What is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? *American Anthropologist*, 86, 65-79.
- Kay, P. & McDaniel, C. (1978). The linguistic significance of the meanings of basic color terms. *Language* 54/3: 610-646.
- Keenan, E. (1989). Norm-makers, norm-breakers: Uses of speech by men and women in a Malagasy community. In Bauman & Sherzer (Eds): 125-143.
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- Levinson, S. C. (2000). Yéî dnye and the theory of basic color terms. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 10: 3-55.
- (2003). Language and mind: Let's get the issues straight! *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought*, ed. by Dedre Gentner and Susan Goldin-Meadow, 25-46. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
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- Slobin, D.I. (1996). From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking". In Gumperz & Levinson (Eds.): 70-96.
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Appendix: Learning goals - Some of the central ideas of linguistic anthropology to be discussed during the course

- Both languages and cultures can be viewed from three complementary perspectives:
 - cognitively, in terms of (declarative or procedural) knowledge
 - semiotically, in terms of (systems of) signs and their interpretations
 - socially, in terms of conventions of social behavior or *practices*
- In each of these respects, the language(s) spoken by the members of a community emerge(s) as a *part* of the larger culture shared by this community
- Cultural knowledge is learned - as opposed to *innate* - knowledge. It is diffused in two ways:
 - through the observation of practices enacted by other members of the community
 - through the use of external representational systems such as language, gesture, and art
- As learned cultural knowledge is complementary to the innate knowledge stored in the human DNA, so cultural evolution has taken over from biological evolution in the development of humankind.
- Given the key role that language plays in the transfer of cultural knowledge, it has been hypothesized that language, culture, and the complex brain that enables humans to learn and use linguistic and cultural knowledge have co-evolved.

- It is an open question what aspects of cognition are innate, biologically determined, and what aspects are learned and culturally diffused. In other words, it is an open question where in the mind the dividing line between *nature* (biology) and *nurture* (culture) is. An important boundary condition on answers to this question is set by the extent to which cognition - e.g., memory, inferences, and similarity judgments - is influenced by language use. The possibility of such influences is claimed by the *Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis* (LRH).
- In the first half of the 20th Century, various authors proposed *strong, deterministic* versions of the LRH, according to which the categories and terms in which people think are (almost) exclusively those of their native language. Under this view, there is a strong influence from language onto internal cognition, but no influence from cognition onto language. Consequently, it is assumed that linguistic categorization varies from language to language “arbitrarily”, i.e., without non-trivial non-linguistic constraints. Historically, this view has been associated in particular with the work of Benjamin Lee Whorf.
- Through its lexical items and constructions, every language expresses a highly complex system of categorizations of reality. This includes categories of the natural world - categories for plants and animals, colors, emotions, kinship relations, and so on. These categories vary somewhat from language to language, reflecting in part differences in cultural significance (e.g., the same plant is cultivated as a food resource in one culture, collected in the wild for medicinal use in another, and considered a weed in the third).
- Evidence for cognitively motivated universals in *ethnosemantics* - the linguistic categorization of the natural world - discourage the strong = deterministic version of the LRH. But a *weaker, non-deterministic* interpretation, according to which non-linguistic cognition exists and functions independently of language, but may nevertheless be influenced by it, is very much debated today.
- The use of language is highly culture-specific. Different cultures recognize different *speech events* - conventional, “scripted” activities in which language plays a constitutive role. These range from simple *speech acts* such as greetings and apologies via economical, political, and judicial transactions and religious or curing rituals to verbal art forms. They can be classified and compared across cultures in terms of, above all, the linguistic expressions and *registers* and the roles of the participants they involve.
- Languages, dialects, registers, and even particular lexical items and grammatical constructions acquire cultural meanings by indexical association with particular groups of people - defined in terms of class, ethnicity, gender, age, and so on - viewed as stereotypically using them. These indexical values in turn become the objects of attitudes both in the users of a particular variety or expression and in other members of the community. Speakers may choose a variety or expression and thereby identify themselves with the stereotypically associated group or choose an alternative and distance themselves from the stereotyped group. These choices constitute secondary indexical associations.
- One of the most important aspects of social interactions is the maintenance of the social ties between the participants. *Politeness* is the cover term for a myriad of linguistic and non-linguistic practices with this goal. The role of politeness is pervasive in all aspects of linguistic structure and language use. The strategies of showing respect and solidarity used in a language are sensitive to fine-grained distinctions in the cultural conceptualization of power and personhood.