

**Course:** LIN 421/521 Language and Culture  
**Term:** Spring 2006  
**Instructor:** Jürgen Bohnemeyer  
**Text:** Reader

**Overview:** This course provides an in-depth view of the relationship between language and culture cross-culturally from the point of view of linguistic anthropology. The course relies on primary readings, looking both at descriptive studies of particular languages and cultures, and theoretical issues, specifically the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis.

**Goals:** The course is designed to familiarize students with concepts and analytical techniques of linguistics and cultural anthropology as they are related to each other, in particular: descriptive linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse studies, semantics, and cognitive aspects of linguistics. One intended outcome is that linguistics students in this class will gain the knowledge of linguistic anthropology required to study a non-western language in the field. Beyond this practical goal, the theoretical goals of this class are to look at the language-cognition interface within its cultural environment, reviewing both classical and recent studies on the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, which states that linguistic practice influences culture-specific conceptualizations and representations of reality.

**Meetings:** Tu/Th 14:00-15:20 in 121 Baldy

**Instructor:** Dr. Jürgen Bohnemeyer – Office 627 Baldy Phone 645-2177 ext. 727  
E-mail [jb77@buffalo.edu](mailto:jb77@buffalo.edu) Office hours Tu 11:00 – 11:30 and Th 10:00-11:00

**Assignments:** Three out of the following four:

- Two homework assignments consisting of data sets to be analyzed
- A “field assignment” for which the students collect data themselves and analyze it – this is obligatory in 521 and optional in 421
- A lit review assignment, where students summarize one (421) or multiple (521) primary readings and present them either in writing (ca. 10 pages) or orally in class (ca. 10 minutes, with handout!) – this is obligatory in 421 and optional in 521

**Assessment:**

- 421: best three assignments, *including the lit review assignment*
- 521: best three assignments, *including the field assignment*
- Grading if field assignment counts: 50% field assignment; 40% best other two assignments; 10% participation
- Grading if field assignment does not count: 90% assignments (30% each); 10% participation

## Syllabus

### Part I: Linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics: Overview

Linguistic anthropology is the anthropology of language use and structure. Both languages and cultures may be viewed as (a) symbolic systems; (b) the knowledge and cognitive processes that enable people to understand and use these symbolic systems; and (c) the patterned actions during which people use the symbolic systems, and the principles and dispositions that direct such actions. Languages are an integral part of the cultures in which they are spoken. Linguistic anthropologists study all aspects of the structure and use of a language that directly depend on the culture of the language community, applying methods of cultural anthropology and sociology. In doing so, they at the same time bring methods of linguistics to the study of culture and society.

#### Week 1: Basics

**Reading:** Boas 1911 (7 pages); Goodenough 1957 (4 pages); Palmer 1996: ch. 2 (17 pages)  
**Background:**<sup>1</sup> Duranti 1997: ch. 1-2; Hudson 1997: ch. 1  
**Optional/Advanced:**<sup>2</sup> Hymes 1974: ch. 4 (34 pages)

### Part II: Language variation in society and linguistic ideologies

We begin by asking what exactly is a language anyway? No two people have the exact same linguistic competence or coincide completely in their patterns of language use. Languages are forever changing. Their differentiation into distinct varieties is driven by the interplay of external socio-cultural pressures and internal structural constraints. Language use is a powerful indicator of group identity. The flip side: communities may be stigmatized and marginalized through their languages, and eventually pressured to abandon them.

**Background:** Bonvillain 1997: ch. 6, 11-12; Hudson 1997: ch. 2

#### Week 2: Social determinants of language variation and change

**Reading:** Eckert 1988 (24 pages)  
**Optional/Advanced:** Milroy & Milroy 1992 (26 pages)

#### Week 3: Language contact and multilingualism

**Reading:** Gumperz & Wilson 1971 (16 pages)  
**Optional/Advanced:** Dorian 1981: ch. 3 (39 pages); Jackson 1989 (15 pages)  
**First assignment,** to be completed and submitted by week 6

#### Week 4: Emergence and disappearance of languages

**Reading:** Dorian 1981: ch. 2 (31 pages)

<sup>1</sup> You may make use of the background readings given for each unit for reference. The content of these readings, wherever relevant, is summarized by the instructor. You won't need to have read any of this to participate or complete assignments!

<sup>2</sup> "Optional/advanced" means follow-up reading for those interested – again, you won't need to have read any of this to participate or complete assignments!

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| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> Schmidt 1985 (23 pages) |
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### **Part III: Culture-specific aspects of linguistic practice**

Cultures are frameworks in which others interpret our actions. A large amount of our actions is subject to cultural conventions (many of which we are usually not aware of). This holds above all for the symbolic actions par excellence: actions of language use. Our verbal interactions depend on the roles we assume in our societies and cultures, such as gender roles. These roles are themselves cultural constructs. A question emerges here which will not go away for the rest of the course: the question of culture vs. nature – in this case, to what extent our socio-cultural actions are governed by biological dispositions, including the neurological circuitry that affords cognition, and to what extent languages and cultures interpret or warp biological and cognitive dispositions. Societies differ widely in their degree of hierarchical stratification and their concepts of personhood. Language communities differ accordingly in the rules that determine what it means to be 'polite' in verbal interaction, i.e. to act in such a way as to preserve the 'face' of the interlocutor. Yet, some underlying principles of goal-directed reasoning seem to be shared across languages and cultures.

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| <b>Background:</b> | Bonvillain 1997: ch. 4-8; Duranti 1997: ch. 9; Foley 1997: ch. 13-18 |
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### **Week 5: Ethnography of speaking**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Sherzer 1989 (20 pages)                      |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Hymes 1972 (36 pages); Sacks 1975 (10 pages) |

### **Week 6: Politeness and 'face'**

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| <b>Reading:</b>  | Brown 2001 (4 pages); Brown & Levinson 1987: 101-129    |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b>  | Matsumoto 1988 (15 pages); Ishiyama in press (20 pages) |
| <b>Second assignment</b> , to be completed and submitted by week 9 |   |

### **Week 7: Power and socio-culturally constructed roles in linguistic practice**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Keenan 1989 (18 pages)                                    |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Bourdieu 1991: ch. 29 (11 pages); Gumperz 1993 (21 pages) |

### **Part IV: Cognitive anthropology and ethnosemantics**

Knowledge does not exist in a culture-free space. This concerns not only knowledge of culture-particular institutions (e.g. art forms; forms of government and economical organization), but also knowledge of the natural world. Languages express the cultural concepts of their speakers, and the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge proceeds to an important extent through language. Linguistic anthropologists study cultural concepts through their linguistic expressions. Languages vary dramatically in how they organize semantic domains. Yet, concept formation and the organization of semantic domains are constrained by culture-independent principles of cognition.

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| <b>Background:</b> | Duranti 1997: ch. 3; Foley 1997: ch. 3-7; Hudson 1996: ch. 3 |
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### **Week 8: Ethnobiology**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Berlin 1992: 20-51   |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Berlin, Breedlove, & Raven 1974: ch. 3 (15 pages);<br>Boster 1985 (20 pages) |

### **Week 9: Kinship**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Lounsbury 1964 (28 pages)                |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Danziger 2001: ch. 1-3 (35 pages)        |
| <b>Third assignment,</b>  | to be completed and submitted by week 12 |

### **Week 10: Color**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Berlin & Kay 1991: ch. 1 (14 pages)   |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Kay & McDaniel 1978 (26 pages); Levinson 2000 (52 pages, eight of which are charts) |

### **Part V: Linguistic relativity**

Do our native languages influence the way we think? Our shared cognitive heritage imposes important constraints on linguistic variation. At the same time, humans must be able to communicate any culture-specific aspects of cognitive representations through 'external' representations, i.e., prominently, language. The question then arises as to just how much of cognition is in fact culture-specific.

A growing body of evidence suggests that language may have an impact on which parts of an object or event we attend to first, which aspects we memorize best, and even on some conceptual choices in the cognitive representation of the object or event. Developmental research indicates that children at very young age "tune into" the semantic categories of the languages they are learning, and that semantic acquisition may have indirect impacts on concept formation.

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| <b>Background:</b> | Duranti 1997: ch. 3; Foley 1997: ch. 8-12; Hudson 1996: ch. 3 |
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### **Week 11: Whorf's ideas and the Neo-Whorfian paradigm**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Whorf 1940 (12 pages) |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Lucy 1992: 85-135     |

### **Week 12: Relativistic effects in universal domains: color, space, time**

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| <b>Reading:</b>   | Kay & Kempton 1984 (14 pages); Pederson et al. 1998 (32 pages) |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b>   | Bohnemeyer 2000 (16 pages)                                     |
| <b>Fourth assignment</b> , to be completed and submitted by week 14 |  |

### **Week 13: Sources of relativistic effects**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Bowerman & Choi 2003 (40 pages) |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Slobin 1996 (27 pages)          |

### **Part VI: The evolution of language, culture, and the brain**

Three things that make us human: language, culture, and an over-sized neocortex. These three systems, in all their baroque complexity, evolved over what seems from a Darwinian perspective an astonishingly short time. How was this possible? Given that we can't have language (as we know it) without culture, or vice versa, and that both presuppose the brain power to run them, while there appears to be nothing but the evolution of language and culture to select for the expansion of the pre-frontal cortex over the past two million years – what evolutionary mechanisms could afford the emergence of these three systems? What can we learn about language, culture, and their relationship by trying to understand how they might have evolved?

### **Week 14: Dawkins, Dennett, and Deacon**

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| <b>Reading:</b>           | Dennett 1996: ch. 12 (34 pages) |
| <b>Optional/Advanced:</b> | Deacon 1992 (27 pages)          |

### **Reading list**

- Bauman, R. & J. Sherzer (Eds.) (1989). *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*. [2nd Edition!] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 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.]
- Bohnemeyer, 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.
- Bonvillain, N. (1997). *Language, culture, and communication*. [2nd Edition!] Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
- Foley, W. A. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- 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.
- Gumperz, J. J. & Wilson, R. (1971). Convergence and creolization: A case from the Indo-Aryan/Dravidian border in India. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Pidginization and creolization in language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hymes, D. (Ed.) (1964). *Language in culture and society*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
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- Ishiyama, O. (in press). Face theory and the Japanese language revisited. To appear in the proceedings of the 2005 Niagara Linguistics Society Conference.
- 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.
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- 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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- McConvell, P. (1985). Domains and codeswitching among bilingual Aborigines. In Clyne (Ed.) 1985: 95-125.
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- Palmer, G. B. (1996). *Toward a theory of cultural linguistics*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
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- Sacks, H. (1975). Everyone has to lie. In M. Sanches & B. G. Blount (Eds.), *Socio-cultural dimensions of language use*. New York, NY: Academic Press. 57- 80. [Reproduced in exerpt in Jaworski & Coupland (1999): 252-262.]
- Schmidt, A. (1985). Speech variation and social networks in dying Dyirbal. In Clyne (Ed.) 1985: 123-150.
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- Slobin, D.I. (1996). From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking". In Gumperz & Levinson (Eds.): 70-96.

Whorf, B. L. (1940). Science and linguistics. *Technology Review* 42: 229-231, 247- 248. [Reprinted in J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 207-219.]