ANTH / LING 203
week 2-part 1

- Linguistic relativity
- Linguistic determinism
- The relationship between Language <--> thought (examples)

Does language shape how we think?

Linguistic relativity—
the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

- Different languages carve up and name the world differently
- different language structures lead you to see and interpret the world in different ways

Principle of relativity,
in Whorf’s words

- “users of markedly different grammars are pointed by the grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of extremely similar acts of observation, and hence are **not equivalent as observers** but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world” (1956)

Linguistic determinism

- Extreme form of relativism (“Strong Whorf”)
- Our language determines how we see the world (we can’t see things another way)

- Not testable, makes bilingualism and translation impossible
- vs. “weak Whorf” (relativism-- predisposition rather than constraint)

Linguistic relativity: examples

Whorf’s examples:
- “Empty” gasoline drums
- Limestone not protected from flame
- Boiling kettle of varnish “off flame”
- Pool of “waste water”
- “blower” spread flames
- “scrap lead” (contained parrafin paper scraps)

more examples…
time & numbering

Standard Average European (SAE) vs. Hopi (Native American Language)

- In English, time & objects counted & talked about in same way, time objectified like a physical quantity
- In Hopi, concept of time as “becoming later”, not like physical quantity that you can “have”
time & numbering continued…

- In Hopi:
  - I will stay until the tenth day
  - the sixth day is later than the fifth
- In English:
  - ten days, ten bottles
  - Five days is less than six days
  - I will be there in ten days
- Also, in English: spatializing non-spatial concepts
  - grasp an argument
  - come to the point
  - views differ widely, are far apart

synaesthesia

- Association of impressions from one sense with another
  e.g.: “Tastes green”
- Spatializing time may be seen as a form of synaesthesia

SAE vs. Hopi

- SAE—a world of things, substance, matter
  time as commodity, things & their functions separate
- Hopi—a world of events, eventing
- What is lost in translation?

Does language shape how we think?

Linguistic relativity—more examples from Whorf’s studies of Native American languages

- the purpose of the following examples is to give you a sense of how differently the grammars of different languages conceptualize & categorize (from Whorf 1956)

More of Whorf’s examples

Figure 17. Here are shown the different ways in which English and Nootka for state the same event. The English sentence is divisible into subject and predicate; the Nootka sentence is not, yet it is complete and logical. Furthermore, the Nootka sentence is past one word, consisting of the unit itself and five suffixes.
Implications of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

- Part of challenge to theories of unilineal social evolution (which posited that simple societies evolve into complex ones)
- Technologically simple societies can have complex, elaborate grammars
- Urges judging of any given language/culture on its own terms

What is lost in translation...

More examples of relationship between language & thought

- Language not only shapes thought—it is shaped by how we use it (feedback loop)
- E.g.—Forms of address: different degrees of social hierarchy & distance in pronouns, titles, honorifics
- Differences in degree of hierarchization vs. democratization of a society

Doctor story

- A father is driving in a car with his son. They get into an accident, the father is killed instantly, and the son is rushed to a hospital. The doctor comes in and says, “I cannot operate, this is my son.”
- How can that be?
Soviet Ukrainian terms

- Reflect Soviet Ukrainian culture & economy (state controlled, prices & supply centrally controlled, products often hard to find but cheap)
- What are they selling?: Shcho dajut’? (What are they giving?)
- They are putting up shoes for sale: Vykydajut’ vzuttia (They are throwing out shoes.)
- Difficulties of translating “privacy”

Language & Thought

- Advertising, politics & economics

  * Think of: an example of language used to manipulate thought in ads or politics.

  e.g. “Swift boat veterans for truth” or “Milky Way lite”

Comparing physicality of concepts of love, like and taste in European languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a taste</td>
<td>gusto</td>
<td>gusto</td>
<td>goût, saveur</td>
<td>Geshmack, Vorliebe [taste for]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to taste</td>
<td>gustar</td>
<td>gustare</td>
<td>goûter</td>
<td>schmecken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like (it)</td>
<td>me gusta</td>
<td>mi piace</td>
<td>j’aime (bien)</td>
<td>ich habe gern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love you</td>
<td>te quiero</td>
<td>ti voglio bene</td>
<td>ca me plaît</td>
<td>ich mag [mögen]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want you</td>
<td>te amo</td>
<td>ti amo</td>
<td>je t’aime</td>
<td>ich liebe dich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>te deseo</td>
<td>ti voglio</td>
<td>je te veux</td>
<td>ich will dich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

German “gern” = “willingly, gladly”
"Vorliebe” = “love for”
Ital. “piacere”, French “plaire” = “to please”
Ital. “assaggiare” = “to try”