

Chapter 11: Language and Culture - Textbook Notes

File 11.1 Linguistic Anthropology

11.1.1: What is Linguistic Anthropology?

Definition of **anthropology**: "the study of humans, past and present."

4 Branches of Anthropology:

- One branch concerns itself with the study of human language
- Sociocultural Anthropology; study of human culture
- Archeology; focuses on past cultures
- Physical Anthropology; concerned with human biology and evolution

Linguistic Anthropology: study of how language interacts with and shapes social structure and culture.

Linguistic anthropologists are interested in speakers using language to represent their natural and social worlds.

In English there are a number of metaphors equating time and money: *Spending* time, *Wasting* ones time, *investing* time in a project, *budgeting* out ones time.

Time in general is something that can be conceived of differently between cultures.

Linguistic anthropology uses varied methods to investigate the link between language and culture.

11.1.2 : Kinship Terms

Cultural values are reflected in language through kinship terms.

Kinship terms in English are organized by gender (brother vs. sister), generation (daughter, mother), and line.g. (direct lineage: mother, son vs. collateral lineage: aunt, nephew).

Emphasis on blood relation vs. relation by marriage, with terms like step-siblings, mother-in-law etc.

In English, emphasis on precisely how one is related (whether direct or collaterally by marriage or blood, and how distantly in generational terms).

Most terms are separated by gender, with different names for the same relationship shade by males and females (ex: sons and daughters share the same relationship to mother, just gender is different).

Studying kinship terms in a specific language can help us ascertain what characteristics the speakers value or consider relevant to social organization.

See example on pages 462, 463.

11.1.3 : Communicative Competence

Researcher Dell Hymes argues that knowing a language means more than just knowing how to produce grammatical utterances.

Speakers must have this cultural understand in order to supply the appropriate response.

Hymes contributed to the concept of **communicative competence**; which is the ability to interact and communicate according to cultural norms.

Things one must know how to be communicatively component in a certain language:

1. Politeness: What counts as “polite” and what is considered “impolite” are culturally determined.

We use politeness strategies at various levels of grammar, ranging from lexical (please, thank you) to morphological (may vs. can) to pragmatic (use of indirect speech acts rather than direct speech acts).

2. Speaker Roles: we speak differently when chatting with a group of friends vs teachers.

Speakers know that interactional expectations change with the setting.

Different roles have different expectations.

Normally, speakers alternate turns relatively frequently, with even the longest turns not lasting more than a few minutes.

Breaking these unspoken rules may make other participants in the interaction uncomfortable.

3. Turn-Taking Roles: speakers alternate turns fairly frequently.

How long we wait to begin talking after another speaker has finished speaking is another culturally determined aspect of speech, and sensitivity to the length of this pause is part of our communicative process.

Not responding to someone may be interpreted as anger.

Expected that a person wont take longer than 10-15 seconds to respond.

Silence between turns is not viewed this way in all speech communities.

Quick responses are considered brash and less thoughtful.

When speakers take turns, they indicate the end of their turn by specifically selecting the next speaker, or by using more generalized tag questions.

Tag Questions: utterances beginning with statements that end with a question about the truth of that statement, tag questions are a way of electing a response to a general statement.

Number of utterances in English that naturally elicit some response such as “How are you?” or “Thank you.” are called **adjacency pairs**: pairs of adjacent utterances

produced by 2 different speakers in which the first utterance provokes the hearer to respond with a second utterance.

Seems odd/rude to get no response to a utterance.

Part 1 of Adjacency Pair	Part 2 of Adjacency Pair	Speech Act
What time is it?	3 o'clock.	Question
Can you pass the salt?	Of course.	Request
Would you like some help?	Yes please.	Offer

4. Greetings

Greeting sequences frequently occur in the form of adjacency pairs.

Examples of greeting adjacency pairs:

Part 1 of Adjacency Pair	Part 2 of Adjacency Pair	Language
What's up?	Not much.	English

In many societies the linguistic structure and variation of standard greetings is not easily explainable without an understanding of the culture in which they are used. Certain types of greetings are also associated with other kinds of social groups. Linguists will often study greetings as a means of exploring the communicative competence of speakers.

11.1.4 : Indexicality

Linguistic anthropologists think of language as a system of **signs**: system of form-meaning pairs.

Signifier: the form (the sound pattern) of a word.

Referent: the object of idea to which it refers.

Charles Sanders Peirce devised a 3 way typology of signs consisting of symbols, icons and indexes.

Symbol: sign that has an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and its referent and thus relies on convention to signify meaning (example of this is language).

-different languages have different words for the same object.

-symbols of a language are expressions.

Icon: unlike a symbol, is a sign whose signifier actually resembled or imitates its referent in some way.

An onomatopoeic expression has an iconic relationship between its signifier (buzz) and its referent (humming buzz of a swarm of bees)

Index: a kind of sign, but the relationship between the signifier and its referent is more complicated.

Signifier of an index does not resemble its referent, but neither is the relationship between signifier and referent arbitrary.

Example: fire causes smoke, so smoke is "symptomatic" of fire.

Discussion of indexicality is often specific to the socio-cultural study of language. Because the signifier and referent of an index is generally not a direct relationship but an association that develops over time- example: specific style of speaking with a certain group of people.

Speech styles can index more than one social quality as well.

Elinor Ochs found rear certain speaking sales and even grammatical markers indexed masculinity and femininity.

Relationship between language variation, which considers what speakers actually say, and indexicality, which considers the associations speakers have between certain forms and certain groups of people.

File 11.3 Language and Power

11.3.1 : The Role of Language in Power Relationships

Idea that words have "power" is not a new one.

We can think of the power of words to hold audiences spellbound, to persuade voters to vote a certain way, convincing customers to buy something etc.

Its really humans use and interpretation of language that is powerful.

Various linguistic cues that individuals engaged in the conversation may use or perceive as indicators of power relations: Is one speaker more dominant or subservient?

Language can be used to exert power over entire communities or societies.

11.3.2 : Power In Conversations

One of the most obvious ways to use language to express power or subservience is to make a direct statement.

Just the association of particular linguistic characteristics with certain social groups is arbitrary, the association of particular linguistic characteristics with the designation of power is also arbitrary.

Power relationships expressed by language are defined by those who use language rather than by any inherent properties of the language.

In different cultures, stereotypes about various aspects of language use are associated with different values (talkativeness, loudness, silence).

Many Western cultures value direct, public speech.

A number of studies of conversation have show that in Western societies, public speech tends to be dominated by men, where again, it is male norms that are more highly valued by the community.

Power in a society is related to a number of different sociological factors. "Powerless" language was marked by the use of hedges ("sort of hot"), polite or complimentary speech ("would you please close the door?"), more indirect statements and so on.

Markers of power or powerlessness are culturally determined.

Power relationships can be established through means that make use of every level of linguistic power.

- Phonetic and Phonological levels, a speaker's prosody and volume can influence.

- Use of certain morphosyntactic structure can likewise signify power or subservience.

- Word choice and the way that lexical items are used can also play a role.

What we call people when we talk to them or about them can also play a role.

Pragmatic factors, such as whether the speaker uses more direct or more indirect speech acts are involved in the marking of power relationships.

Message conveyed by the use of any of these strategies will vary between societies and speech communities.

11.3.3 : Power in Society

Language is a powerful tool for establishing more global power relationships: power relationships that are established not between individuals, but rather within and between entire communities.

Strategies used to establish these more global sorts of power relationships are not based on particular individual uses of language, but rather on prescriptions of how language may be used at all, or which languages may be used.

Language is used to create power relationships within a society on a large scale through "official" languages adopted by the governments of particular nations. Adv-government business must be conducted in that language. Disadv- can cause anyone who doesn't speak that language to be at a disadvantage.

Many reasons for a nation to declare an official language- many languages spoken within the borders, government must pick one or two official languages.

Some countries declare an indigenous language to be official in order to preserve the language heritage.

Moves like these can have social ramifications- both positive and negative.

Issues of multilingualism, nationhood and language planning are extremely complicated and the subject of much study, debate and politics.

An interesting and unformatted case of how language and choice of language have been used to subjugate a community can be found in the case of how various institutions have instituted policies about the use of sign language.

Educators and politicians have created a linguistic power difference between deaf and hearing individuals, even within Deaf institutions.

In some communities those who use one modality are seen as more powerful, whereas in other communities those who use the other are seen as more powerful.

In order for successful linguistic communication to take place between individuals the individuals need to have some language in common.

Any language (ex. ASL or Irish) has particular import, cultural value, and communicative significance for the communities of speakers who use it. Recognizing or not recognizing a language as official will inevitably lead to perceptions of how that language does or does not connote power within the society.

File 11.4 : Politeness

11.4.1 : Politeness across Cultures

Politeness is part of the communicative competence of native speakers, and knowing what is polite in a given context is often as important as knowing the words of a language.

Politeness differs between languages and even within a single language.

Politeness generally consists of a normative or expected linguistic and extralinguistic strategies culturally agreed to be interjectionally appropriate for a given situation.

The role of politeness is often to avoid conflict, build rapport, and promote cooperative communication despite the sometimes differing goals of participants.

Politeness is culturally defined and, as a result, differs between languages and cultures.

11.4.2 : Indirectness

While direct speech is clear and unambiguous, speakers often opt for strategies more like those seen while making requests. This is because the cultural norm for English is to make requests via implicature rather than directly.

See example on page 480

11.4.3 : Honorifics

Honorifics are grammatical markers of respect and deference that are found in many languages including Japanese, Korean and more.

In order to delimit social rank and/or social distance.

Deciding which honorific to use when talking to another speaker requires knowledge of that person's age, social position, and role in the specific situation.

See example on page 481.

The T/V Distinction

The T/V distinction refers to distinguishing second-person pronouns (ex. you) in terms of social distance or intimacy. Using the 'T' form when talking to someone means that you are familiar or comfortable with her, or of an equal or higher status, while using the

'V' form marks formality, respect or a power differential between you and the person you are talking to. The 'V' form is also used for strangers. Because English no longer makes this distinction, acquiring T/V forms often causes difficulty for English-speaking students learning French or Spanish, especially since the social expectations in using these pronouns can be quite complex. These potential problems in deciding upon proper, polite usage of T/V pronouns have led to some languages developing verbs that are used to openly discuss use of the "T" or "V" form.

11.4.5 : Face Theory

One of the most influential approaches to studying politeness has been Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's **face theory**. This theory is based on the idea of **face** or positive self image, which can be seen in the common English phrase "to lose face", which means to lose public respect or to have one's reputation damaged.

Brown and Levinson (1987) theorized that there are two kinds of face at play at all times: positive face and negative face.

Positive face is one's desire to be approved of by others, while negative face is one's desire not to be bothered or have one's independence infringed upon.

Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) are speech acts, such as requests or orders that may threaten one's positive and/or negative face.

Speakers may use a number of politeness strategies: a) positive politeness, b) negative politeness and c) off-record FTAs. If no politeness or mitigation strategy is used, the actions are called **bald on-record FTAs**.

Positive Politeness is oriented toward positive face wants- using positive politeness, a speaker is trying to show that he likes his addressee.

The 'T' in the T/V distinction uses positive politeness.

Negative Politeness is oriented toward the hearer's desire to be left alone, with negative politeness strategies expressing the speaker's restraint and avoidance of imposing on the hearer.

Indirectness is a kind of negative politeness, as it is the use of the 'V' form in T/V languages.

Off-record FTA strategies generally consist of indirect speech acts that avoid making any explicit or unequivocal imposition on the hearer.

Brown and Levinson propose that this choice is dependent on three types of social factors:

1. Social distance (symmetric relationship between speaker and hearer)
2. Power (asymmetric relationship between speaker and hearer)
3. Ranking (how much the FTA would impose on the hearer)

Brown and Levinson intended their theory to be universal, although as it is probably clear by now, the interpretations of certain politeness strategies differ between cultures.

File 11.5 : Ethnography

11.5.1 : What is Ethnography?

A common way of studying language and culture is by performing **fieldwork**. Which involved going to the specific communities where a language variety is spoken in order to gather information about the speech community and the language itself.

Focus of the fieldwork is to document the way language is used in daily communication.

One method is by writing an **ethnography** or a description of everyday life in the community. This approach is used within anthropology to better understand different cultures around the world, and within linguistic anthropology to understand the intersection between language and culture.

Researchers use this to make is not obvious to an outsider, to look at communities cultural norms and its perspective on social activities, kinship ties, the physical world and other aspects of everyday life.

An ethnography takes months or years in a community before trusting they have completed an adequate description.

Participant Observation consists of systematically observing within a community in order to understand how and why people do the things they do.

2 ways to perform participant observation: passive participation and complete participation.

Passive Participation consists of passively watching how everyday life unfold without partaking in any local activities in order to cause the least disturbance possible to the daily routine of the community being studied. This can result in more objective observations of the way people communicate.

Complete Participation in contrast is a strategy in which the researcher actively participates in the community, attempting to see firsthand how the community functions from the point of view of a local. Researcher gains information that could not be otherwise gathered. Danger in this approach- because a researcher's subjective experience of a community, does not necessarily reflect the entire community's overall thoughts, beliefs and perceptions.

Researchers use a combination of these techniques to juggle both the desire to acquire a native or insiders perspective on language and culture and the need to remain as objective as possible in order to accurately describe the community.

11.5.2: Etic and Emic

Certainly is a difference between the outsiders description of an interaction and an insiders perspective on that same interaction. This different as epic versus emic.

Phonemic difference: when the phonemic differences between two sounds distinguishes meaning.

We can study the phonetic details of a language fairly straight forwardly, but in order to study the phonemic distinctions we need a native speaker of that language to tell us when a change in sound changes the meaning of a word.

Etic description is one that describes from an objective, outsiders point of view, not taking into account the local significant of certain actions.

Emic description is an insiders description of the events in the meaning of the actions is taken for granted and described as the viewer sees it.

See examples on page 485.

While ethnography aims to get at the insiders or emic, perceptives of every interaction, describing situations from an etic point of view can slo be helpful to researchers trying to understand local customs, since the etic point of view is in many ways a more accessible perspective to outsiders than the emic perspective.