

STUDENT PREFACE

Dear Students: User-friendly is a term that I believe was first used to describe computers, but that is exactly what I intend for this book to be—a user-friendly introduction to linguistic anthropology. It is also intended to be brief! It will give you an idea of how language works and how people use it. It will also give you some basic analytical skills and show you some ways to apply those skills to real-life situations. We will cover all four fields of anthropology: physical anthropology, archaeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. So, for example, you will read about the origins and evolution of language, the fossil record and archaeological evidence for language beginnings, dating and tracing language change, and reconstructing ancient languages. You will read about language diversification, issues surrounding dialects and standards, bilingualism and the “English Only” movement in the United States, and endangered languages and language revitalization programs. You will read about sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, nonverbal communication, writing systems, and the role of play in language. You will learn basic descriptive/structural and transformational/generative approaches to describing and analyzing languages, and you will learn how to apply these approaches to everyday situations. A special feature of the book is its stress on contemporary issues and the applied dimensions of linguistic anthropology. At the end of each chapter, you will find pointers to additional exercises and readings, both in the workbook/reader and on the companion website. On the companion website, you will find study questions, links to other sites, information for several applied projects that you can do, and access to InfoTrac College Edition, a collection of journal articles that you can search for additional interesting readings.

This textbook is designed to be brief and basic—a simple and straightforward jumping-off point. The first and last chapters are particularly brief, just to whet your appetite in the beginning and to reward and challenge you at the end. They are a bit like appetizer and dessert, with the internal chapters serving as the main meal, providing you with deeper explanations of the ideas, skills, and techniques you will need to begin practicing linguistic anthropology in your daily lives. The workbook/reader will provide you with additional depth, expand on specific themes, and give you practice with the technical aspects of linguistic anthropology. The guided projects will take you even further, providing you with practical applications of the ideas you are reading about. The companion website will point you in still more relevant directions for exploration and practice. Your instructor will be your guide. Follow carefully, and be sure to ask lots of questions.

CHAPTER 1

Linguistic Anthropology

In the Field, Comoro Islands, September 1967

“Table,” we had said. “We’ll need a table. For writing. For eating.”

We figured one table could do for both tasks, much as kitchen tables serve both purposes in the United States.

“Okay,” our young translator had said, “the landlord says he will provide a table.”

But now here we were, exploring our new apartment, and we couldn’t find the table. We searched the two rooms thoroughly and explored the outdoor kitchen and bathroom areas as well, but there was no table. Just a large flat metal tray, leaning up against the wall.

“Table,” we said when our translator stopped by to see how we were doing. “You said the landlord would provide a table.”

The translator looked around the apartment. “Here it is,” he said brightly, picking up the metal tray.

“Ah,” we said, “but we meant a table with legs, so we can use it as a writing desk.”

“Okay,” he said, “I’ll explain it to the landlord and we’ll see if we can find a desk for you.”

The next day our monolingual landlord brought us a wooden table with legs. We smiled and tried to remember how to say “Thank you,” and felt like our fieldwork was finally beginning. We also knew that to fit into this new culture and do good anthropology we were going to have to learn the language. We were going to need linguistic anthropology.

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What is linguistic anthropology, and why do anthropologists need it? Linguistic anthropology draws from a remarkable combination of disciplines. Taking its cue from the even broader discipline of anthropology, of which it is a part, linguistic anthropology reaches out in every direction to make sense of language in every sense of the word.

Linguistic anthropology goes beyond analyzing the structure and patterning of language (a central focus of linguistics) to examine the contexts and situations in which language is used. It looks at how language might have begun; how it is learned; how it changes; and how it is written down, read, and played with. It looks at how we use words (or silences) to control situations or to exert power or influence others, and how we react to different accents and ways of speaking. It looks at ideas we have about languages and how they should be used. It wonders whether the words we use for things affect the way we experience them, and it wonders whether speaking different languages causes humans to view the world differently from one another. In this book, we will explore some of these directions and provide a basic understanding of the field of linguistic anthropology, particularly within the context of anthropology.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Because linguistic anthropology is a part of anthropology, it is important to take a moment to describe anthropology more generally and to show where linguistic anthropology fits in. **Anthropology** can be briefly defined as the study of all people, at all times, and in all places. Broadly conceived and comparative in nature, anthropology seeks to understand differences and to discover similarities in human behavior. It is holistic, it is comparative, and it is fieldwork-based.

Anthropology Is Holistic

Anthropology can be said to be **holistic** because it is concerned with seeing the whole picture, with finding all the parts of the human puzzle and putting them together in a way that makes sense. In the United States, in particular, this quest for holism has resulted in what many of us refer to as the **four-field tradition**, in which anthropology is thought of as incorporating four general branches (commonly called subfields):

- physical (or biological) anthropology—the study of human origins, variation, and evolution
- archaeology—the study of prehistory and the analysis of ancient cultures
- cultural anthropology—the study of cultural traditions and the analysis of human behavior and belief systems
- linguistic anthropology—the study of language and language use in social and cultural contexts

Anthropologists trained in the United States are expected to have a thorough understanding of the basics of all four branches of anthropology, together with an in-depth specialization in one branch. Anthropology is

an unusual discipline by virtue of its very interdisciplinarity. Some of the boundaries between the subfields of anthropology are clearer than others and some of the subfield boundaries become sites for particularly intriguing research and theoretical speculation. Anthropology has always had an *applied* dimension as well, and in recent years some have argued that applied anthropology should be considered a fifth branch. This is not the place to review the pros and cons of this idea; suffice it to say that all four traditional branches of anthropology have always had—and probably will always continue to have—an applied dimension.

Why do we insist on this breadth of knowledge in anthropology? Why not just focus on the areas that interest us the most? Most anthropology students ask these questions at one time or another. Why know about stone tools, for example, if you are going to be a linguistic or cultural anthropologist? Or why learn the fine points of phonemes (sounds) and morphemes (meanings) if you are going to be an archaeologist or physical anthropologist? The answers reveal a lot about the holistic nature of anthropology and the rich interconnections between its branches: to explore the beginnings of human language you need to understand the biological possibilities, interpret the archaeological record, and assess the complex relationship between the development of language and the development of culture; you need to be able to interpret skeletal remains, tool collections, and settlement patterns just to be able to begin to pinpoint when human language might have been possible. Or you might be able to figure out exactly where specific populations might have lived in archaic times just by knowing how to reconstruct the language they might have spoken, particularly if that archaic language includes words for certain plants and animals and not for others.

I must admit to having had similar reservations about learning all four branches of anthropology when I was a student. I didn't quite see the point of studying archaeology, for example, when I was interested in linguistic anthropology. But I will never forget the thrill of recognizing a roughly hewn stone tool lying along a riverbank in the Comoro Islands and the subsequent thrill of learning, from an archaeologist with expertise in the area, that it might be an example of a long-sought-for proto-Polynesian hand ax. Had I been more narrowly trained, focusing only on linguistic anthropology, I am sure I would never have "seen" that stone tool, nor would I have bothered to show it to an archaeologist. Instead, I can feel as though I have contributed in some small way to the archaeology of the Indian Ocean region, to the study of ancient migrations in the region, and perhaps even to anthropology as a whole.

The four-field holistic approach in anthropology implies that for a full and complete understanding of human beings it is necessary to understand biological origins, prehistory, cultural traditions, and language use. Each of these overlaps with the others in significant ways, and the anthropologist who ignores any one of the subfields runs the risk

of missing out on significant insights for his or her own area of focus. In other words, anthropology is holistic because it is the only way to really understand human behavior and beliefs at all times and in all places.

Anthropology Is Comparative

The **comparative** nature of anthropology refers to its goal of gathering and comparing information from many cultures, times, and places, including our own. The more examples we can draw from and compare to other examples, the more complete a picture we can get of how and why humans behave as they do. Collecting and analyzing information about human beings from many different places in the world makes it possible to gain an understanding of the full range of what it means to be human. It even makes it possible to extend our understanding of this range as we encounter examples from additional locations. We learn from this enterprise that the color of our skin or hair or eyes, or the way we make tools or clothing, or the way we choose our marriage partners or cook our meals, or the way we talk to one another is not the only way to be or the only way to do things. We learn that other possibilities exist and that they work as well (or as badly) for other people as our ways work for us. Anthropologists have a term for this understanding. We call it “cultural relativity.”

Cultural relativity is the idea that differences exist among cultural systems, that different cultural systems can make as much sense as our own, and that we can learn to understand these different systems. “Ethnocentrism,” another term developed by anthropology, is almost the opposite of cultural relativity. It is sometimes defined as judging others by one’s own terms, but it is really more subtle than this. **Ethnocentrism** means *not* understanding different systems on their own terms. There are two aspects to this: the first involves using your own system to interpret what others are doing, the second involves insisting that your own system is the only one that makes any sense. An example of the first is traveling to another country where the monetary system is different and wondering how much things cost in “real” money (meaning your own money from back home). An example of the second is deciding that there is no functioning economic system in the country to which you have traveled because you don’t recognize what they are using as money at all! It is this second kind of ethnocentrism that anthropologists generally are referring to when they caution you to “avoid ethnocentrism.”

The first kind of ethnocentrism is fairly easy to identify and to overcome. Generally, all it takes is shifting our frames of reference enough to comprehend how the other system works. **Frames of reference** are the ways we see and interpret and understand the world. Think of the frames on eyeglasses; not only do they hold the lenses but they define what will be in focus and what will not, what we will notice and what we will ignore. Contrary to popular opinion, learning other frames of

reference does not require us to abandon our own. The fear of losing one’s own frames of reference is what seems to cause the second kind of ethnocentrism and also what makes it more difficult to identify and overcome. If you truly believe that the way in which you view the world is the only true way to view it and that all other points of view are dangerous and might cause you to lose your footing in your own world or cause changes in your own world that you are not prepared to accept, then you will have difficulty—in fact you will probably be afraid of—truly understanding another culture or language.

Perhaps the idea that language and culture are intimately connected to one another helps to fuel these fears. And perhaps the idea, held by many monolingual Americans, that it is only possible to really know one language or culture completely fluently adds fuel to the fire. Although these are real fears, all of the data available to us suggests that language and culture, although related in intriguing ways, are not really the same thing and that it is possible to speak two, three, or even more languages competently without losing one’s sense of culture or self. The complex connections between language and culture have been the subject of much research by cultural and linguistic anthropologists, and has attracted the attention of scholars in many other fields as well. Edward Sapir (1884–1939) was one of the early anthropologists to focus his attention on how language affects culture and worldview, and his insights have inspired thinkers in many fields to this day. Sapir suggested that our linguistic habits might affect the way we experience and think about the world around us. What does it mean, for example, that our Comorian landlord used the single word *mesa* for both ‘tray for eating on’ and ‘table or desk with four legs’ and how might this affect his view of tables, desks, and trays in general? What does it mean that Comorian has just one word *-a* to express both ‘he’ and ‘she’? What does it mean that English has two different words for *he* and *she* but that *he* sometimes can stand for either men or women?

We will address these issues more fully in the chapters to come. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that it is possible not only to learn new languages without losing competence in your own but to understand other cultural systems in their own terms without losing confidence in your own. In fact, learning about other languages and cultures can help you to better understand your own language and culture and to also understand how they work and how they influence you. Anthropology, and especially linguistic anthropology, provides the framework and methodology, the tools and the techniques, for doing this. You will learn many of these skills in this book.

Anthropology is also comparative in another sense. In addition to seeking diversity in our understanding, we attempt to compare and analyze differences in order to discover possible underlying similarities. We may find, for example, that there is a wide variety of kinship systems

around the world or that there are some dramatically different ways of talking about time and place, but underneath it all we find that all humans classify kinfolk as opposed to nonkin and that all languages have verbs and nouns. It is just as important for us to understand our similarities as our differences if we are going to make sense of what it means to be human.

Anthropology Is Fieldwork-Based

I said earlier that anthropology provides us with the means to understand other cultural systems on their own terms. It is fieldwork that makes this possible. Spending time in another cultural system is not only the best way, it is probably the only way to truly gain an insider's understanding of that system. Although there is some kind of fieldwork in all four branches of anthropology, it is **fieldwork** in cultural and linguistic anthropology that takes you into another living human culture where you are expected to adapt and adjust your frames of reference until you can understand and operate successfully within that cultural or linguistic system (see Figure 1.1). Once you have successfully adjusted your frames of reference, you are better equipped to translate across cultures, to interpret contrasting concepts, and to explain divergent views.



Harriet Ottenheimer

FIGURE 1.1 Linguistic anthropology is fieldwork-based: here the author becomes part of a cooking group in the Comoro Islands.

Cross-Language Miscommunication 1.1



GLASSES OF SHERRY

One evening, in a bar, my son observed a German couple attempting to order sherry. "Two glasses of sherry, please," said the German gentleman to the bartender. "Dry sherry?" the bartender asked. "No, *two* sherry," replied the German man. "Yes, but do you want *dry* sherry?" repeated the bartender. "No," repeated the German man, some exasperation creeping into his voice, "we want only *two* sherry!" "Perhaps I can help," said my son. "The bartender wants to know if you would like your sherry *troken* ('dry') or not." "Yes, *troken* would be fine," replied the German man, a bit relieved to find someone who could help translate for him. So the German couple got their sherry and my son got to practice his German.

What had gone wrong? The English word *dry* sounds just like the German word *drei* 'three', so to the German man it sounded like the bartender was asking him if he wanted three sherries, not two. Sometimes it's something as simple as a word that creates cross-language difficulties. Sometimes it's something more complicated, like the way a word fits into a sentence or the tone of voice or general style of speaking that someone is using. Whenever people from different language communities try to communicate, there is always room for misunderstandings.

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And it is here, perhaps more than in any other part of anthropology, that there is significant potential for the application of anthropology in everyday life.

One good example of how different views of the same information can be expressed in different languages and can have an impact on everyday life is the ways that English and Czech talk about the passage of time. In English, the phrase *half-past ten* expresses the clock time 10:30. In Czech, the same clock time is expressed by a phrase that translates as 'half of eleven'. We could speculate on the difference of perspective that this seems to imply, but we should also note that if you do not pay close enough attention to the way the time is expressed in spoken form, you could miss your appointment.

Not only is fieldwork essential in cultural and linguistic anthropology, but, to gain a true understanding of people and culture, the fieldwork should be conducted in the language spoken by the people among whom you are going to be living and learning. The fieldwork story from

the Comoro Islands (at the beginning of this chapter), which illustrates the different meanings of the word *table*, shows why it is never sufficient to rely on dictionaries or interpreters to communicate effectively. If your goal is to learn a different worldview, to understand different frames of reference, then learning and using the language in the field is essential.

The strong emphasis on fieldwork in American anthropology traces its origins to the teachings of Franz Boas (1858–1942), the first professor of anthropology in the United States. When Boas first came to America from Germany in the late 1800s, many scholars in the United States were working to document and describe Native American languages and cultures. They were analyzing texts, word lists, and other linguistic data looking for clues about how the different native languages could be classified into family groupings. This was an extension of the kind of linguistic work that was already being done in Europe; the kind of work that led to the classification of French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese—all of which had “descended” from Latin—into a single language family. It reflected the kind of evolutionary thinking that was dominant at the time. Many scholars of the day assumed that by classifying languages into groups they would also be classifying the people who spoke those languages into related groups, or cultures. Different cultures were thought to represent different levels of complexity from ancient beginnings to modern times, from early groups of hunters and gatherers to contemporary civilizations. It was even thought that cultures representing “earlier” levels were closer to nature and therefore closer to an ideal state that modern humans had drifted (or evolved) away from.

Boas, however, wasn’t sure that it was correct to classify cultures in terms of language. He also worried that the kinds of evolutionary theories and romantic writings that supported such classification were likely to lead to racist and nationalistic thinking. So when he published his *Handbook of American Indian Languages* in 1911, he wrote in the introduction about how difficult it was to find significant one-to-one correlations between race and culture, between language and culture, and between language and race. These early statements about the separability of language, race, and culture made an important contribution to early anthropology in the United States, taking the strong stance that it did against the growing racist and nationalistic sentiments of the time.

Boas did link language and culture in more subtle ways, however. Arguing that language played an important role in culture, he suggested that the study of language was an important part of cultural anthropology. He wrote that, because cultural anthropology (he called it “ethnology”) focused on people’s “mental life” (or worldview) and human language was “one of the most important manifestations of mental life,” then the study of human language belonged “naturally to the field of work of ethnology” (Boas 1911, 63). And he therefore taught his students that learning the language was an important part of learning a culture.

Boas also insisted that his students do extended fieldwork. Although much interesting data had been collected about other cultures by European and American missionaries, travelers, explorers, and in some cases even colonial administrators by the turn of the twentieth century, most of the information was gathered during short visits or collected by individuals who lived somewhat apart from the people they were writing about and who made extensive use of interpreters and translators. As a result, much of the information that had been gathered was limited, faulty, or just plain shallow, interpreted through the lens of the collector’s or interpreter’s culture, and as such was not reliable enough to use for anthropological analysis. Boas argued that to fully understand another people and their cultural system it was necessary to live with them for an extended period of time, on their own terms, and using their language. His position was that you could go into the field, live with other people, and observe their daily activities but that you could not really gain a sense of how they viewed the world around them unless you could speak with them directly and not through an interpreter.

Once Boas and his students began collecting data through fieldwork in the language of the people they were studying, the quality of understanding of different cultural and linguistic systems improved dramatically. Because Boas was instrumental in founding the study of anthropology in the United States, fieldwork conducted in the language of the people has been considered an essential part of American anthropology, and every cultural and linguistic anthropologist trained in the United States is expected to spend at least one full year in the field.

Part of Boas’s legacy is linguistic anthropology’s continued reliance on fieldwork as a primary source of data. Although it is possible to learn the fundamentals of a language in a classroom or from a tutor or from a book, none of these approaches provides a full picture of the way that language is actually used. You can pick the words you need out of a dictionary and string them together in accordance with the appropriate grammatical rules, but unless you learn to speak among actual speakers of a language, you will never be able to know when *bad* really means ‘good’ or whether *bogus* means ‘false’ or ‘fantastic!’ The fact that words can have specific meanings in specific situations and can shift their meanings depending on the situation and on who is saying what to whom and why means that to get a full understanding of a language you must study it in its cultural context. This means fieldwork (see Figure 1.2).

Fieldwork is often discussed, but it is little understood. In some cases, it is highly romanticized; in some cases, it is diminished to meaning nothing more than a brief trip to an unusual (for the traveler) destination. In fact, what it means, especially for linguistic and cultural anthropologists, is living in another place among people who are different from you, on their own terms, learning and speaking their language, and gaining, insofar as possible, a sense of how the world appears through



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FIGURE 1.2 Fieldwork opportunities can occur at unexpected moments: here a Taiwanese ethnographer learns about harvesting sorghum.

their eyes, how to speak about the world as they might. Because we are guests of the people whose language and culture we wish to learn, anthropologists have adopted a code of ethics that guides behavior, both in the field and when writing about the field and the data collected there (see *Doing Linguistic Anthropology* 1.1: Ethics in Linguistic Anthropology). First articulated formally in the 1940s and refined and annotated over the years, the American Anthropological Association's Statement on Ethics can be read at the association's website.



WEBLINK To read the AAA statement on ethics, go to academic.cengage.com/anthropology/ottenheimer2e

The essential core of the statement is often summed up in the phrase "do no harm," but it is more complex than that. As professionals, anthropologists are expected to be particularly attentive to how their presence, or their writings, might endanger the people who are hosting them, from revealing sensitive political or religious information to introducing damaging changes (see *Doing Linguistic Anthropology* 1.2: An Ethical Dilemma). Of course, just the presence of an outsider in another culture will introduce some changes, but the idea is to be aware of your potential impact on your hosts and to be as respectful as possible of their concerns.

Doing Linguistic Anthropology 1.1

ETHICS IN LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Because our research involves the collection and analysis of cultural property (language), linguistic anthropologists must adhere to a code of ethics. We frequently collect information that is of great interest to the people who speak the language we are studying and may cover some sensitive topics. We also work closely with elders and other respected members of society whose trust and confidences must be retained through ethical conduct.

To maintain the trust of the speakers of Muskogee, a language spoken by the Muskogee/Creek and Seminole people of Oklahoma, I have provided copies of our interviews to those people with whom I have worked. Through this means, the consultants get to keep a record of everything we have discussed. In many cases, these tapes have been copied for members of the consultants' families and others in the community. Thus, my consultants not only have a means of verifying what they have told me, but also are able to keep the information and knowledge they have available for other community members to know.

My concern for ethics has also stimulated my practice of allowing consultants to read through drafts of written work about their language. Consultants' comments on the material produced from our work often point out things I have missed in my own analysis or alternative readings of what I had analyzed. Their feedback allows for an accurate portrayal of the emic, or insider, perspective on linguistic issues. This practice also allows consultants to decide whether information they have shared with me should be made public. In some cases, I have been told things that I had not considered to be confidential, only to find out that my consultants did not want their views or knowledge to be shared with a larger audience!

Pamela J. Innes, *University of Wyoming*

For the successful linguistic anthropologist, data collection can take place on at least two levels: the level of carefully collecting, cataloging, analyzing, and writing about the language and the level of total immersion in the language to the point that you can speak it naturally and competently. Only in this way is it possible to compare and contrast worldviews as they are encapsulated within languages and to address the larger issues of comparison on a holistic basis.

Doing Linguistic Anthropology 1.2



AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

In 1982 I was asked to serve as a paid consultant to the bishops of Panama to teach priests and nuns working in the Ngobe (Guaymí) area of Panama how to better learn the indigenous language of their native constituents. The language, which belongs to the Chibchan family, has a complex phonology that seems to have impeded the efforts of the clergy to learn the language.

While I was deciding whether to accept the job, I learned that my prospective students were dealing with a population that did not speak Spanish, the few Ngobe who did speak Spanish were not literate, and most importantly a large mining corporation wanted their land. Representatives of that company regularly came with “gifts” for the community, and in return for the gifts, the people would, with a fingerprint, sign a piece of paper that was basically a land sale document. Although the priests would sometimes be present when this happened, they were unable to explain why it was an unfair exchange.

The decision to hire a field linguist to “teach” the clergy the indigenous language so that they could communicate more effectively for the good of the native community was, in my value system, a good thing. However, after I was already involved in the project, I learned that these students felt it important to try to end Ngobe polygamous relationships. Herein lay my dilemma. If they learned the language well enough, they might interfere in aspects of the culture that I did not feel was any of their business. What ethical behavior was called for?

Ultimately, I followed the principle of least harm. I felt that more harm would befall the Ngobe if they had no help in holding on to their land; my concern about meddling in their marital practices was thus less important. My concern was also diminished when I found out that the church had come to a kind of Solomonian decision: those men who had more than one wife would be encouraged to take care of their multiple wives and their children, but they were encouraged not to replace a wife if she died or left the marriage. At the same time the church discouraged further non-monogamous liaisons. I thus was able to continue my job without feeling I was compromising my personal ethics.

Harriet E. Manelis Klein, *Stony Brook University*

THEORETICAL LINGUISTICS

If anthropology is holistic, comparative, and fieldwork-based, contemporary **theoretical linguistics**, by contrast, can be described as focused, specific, and intuitive. It is focused in that its primary goal is to describe the underlying structure of a language, beyond the social and cultural contexts in which that language is used. It is specific in that it seeks language universals in the underlying structures of specific languages. And it is intuitive in that its primary data-gathering method is introspection, in which the linguist thinks deeply about his or her own language or works with a single native speaker of a language, assessing whether various possible constructions “feel” grammatically correct or not. In fact, theoretical linguistics is sometimes referred to as formal linguistics, because of its emphasis on the deep analysis of formal linguistic structures and rules, or as autonomous linguistics, because of its emphasis on the scientific study of language as an “external, impersonal object” (R. Lakoff 1989, 974), objectively observable and analyzable in and of itself.

Generalizing from specific languages to universal principles can have interesting results. One theoretical linguist has noted, for example, that languages in which objects follow verbs, as in *to see the cat*, seem to always use prepositions, for example, *to see the cat in the tree* (Pinker 1994, 204). Although this might be true for most languages in which objects follow verbs (as they do in English), my own experience with Shinzwani (a language spoken in the Comoro Islands, in the western Indian Ocean) contradicts this observation. In Shinzwani objects follow verbs just like in English, as in *huona mpaha* ‘to-see the-cat’, but Shinzwani uses *postpositions* rather than prepositions, for example, *huona mpaha mwirijuu* ‘to-see the-cat tree-in’.

Because theoretical linguistics focuses more on language form and structure than on the social and cultural contexts in which language is used, it tends to explain phenomena such as the Great English Vowel Shift (a major shift in the way vowels were pronounced in English that occurred around the fifteenth century) in linguistic rather than social or cultural terms. The focus is on developing generalizable rules for sound change that might be applicable to other cases of language change. Linguistic anthropologists, on the other hand, who have observed similar kinds of changes in contemporary language use, such as vowel shifting among teenage girls in California, are intrigued by the role that these linguistic changes play in defining important social and cultural differences. For example, the “New Yawk” vowels that I learned growing up are now thought of as old-fashioned and lower-class by contemporary New Yorkers. The vowels have shifted over time in response to a variety of social and cultural pressures, and nowadays I need to be careful of the impression I am making with my choice of vowels. Some

interactions call for old-fashioned, down-home, in-group types of vowels; some do not. It is up to me to gauge each situation and to act appropriately. Or effectively. Linguistic anthropologists are intrigued by the interactions between language change, social status, and cultural identity and by how people navigate these complex waters. The search for universals of linguistic behavior is important, but it is also important to understand how linguistic behavior is affected by (and affects) social and cultural behavior. Understanding language—and the ways that humans use language—from a holistic, comparative, and fieldwork-based perspective is what sets linguistic anthropology clearly apart from theoretical linguistics. We will have more to say about these kinds of understandings in the chapters that follow, especially in Chapters 5 and 9.

SUMMARY

Linguistic anthropology seeks to make sense of language. It is a subfield within the field of anthropology, which itself is a holistic, comparative, and fieldwork-based discipline. In addition to linguistic anthropology, there are three other subfields of anthropology: physical (biological) anthropology, archaeology (historical anthropology), and cultural anthropology. The interconnections among the four subfields make it possible to develop a full and complete understanding of human beings.

Because anthropology is holistic it views the whole picture. Because it is comparative, it has the goal of gathering and comparing information from many cultures, times, and places. As a fieldwork-based discipline, it explores other cultures, requiring the explorers to not only adjust their frames of reference but also to learn the languages of the people among whom they are living.

Through anthropology we can get beyond our sense of ethnocentrism and learn to understand different systems on their own terms. To do this we need to shift our frames of reference so that we can see, interpret, and understand the world in different ways. Through comparing different frames of reference, we can discover underlying similarities between different cultures.

Fieldwork was a firm emphasis of Franz Boas. Boas taught that there was no intrinsic one-to-one connection among language, race, and culture; yet he believed that language and culture might be linked in subtle ways. As a result, he insisted that learning a language was an important part of fully learning a culture. Collecting data in the language of the people you are studying improves the quality of your understanding of their cultural and linguistic system. Learning about other languages and cultures also helps you to better understand your own language and culture.

In contrast to linguistic anthropology, theoretical linguistics can be described as focused, specific, and intuitive. The primary focus is on

form and structure, with little or no attention to the social contexts in which language is used, and generalizations about universal patterns in language may be made from limited data. This book takes the position that understanding human language is best approached from the perspective of a holistic, comparative, and fieldwork-based discipline such as linguistic anthropology.

KEY TERMS

anthropology
comparative
cultural relativity
ethnocentrism
fieldwork
four-field tradition
frames of reference
holistic
linguistic anthropology
theoretical linguistics

FURTHER READING

About Linguistic Anthropology

Brenneis, Donald, and Ronald K. S. Macaulay, eds. 1996. *The matrix of language: Contemporary linguistic anthropology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. This is a very readable collection of articles about linguistic anthropology, clearly demonstrating the connections between language, culture, and social practice.

Duranti, Alessandro. 2001a. Linguistic anthropology: History, ideas, and issues. In *Linguistic anthropology: A reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti, 1–38. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Although challenging for beginners, this is a good summary of the development of the field of linguistic anthropology.

About Theoretical Linguistics

Harris, Randy Allen. 1993. *The linguistics wars*. New York: Oxford. This is a lively and very readable account of the development of theoretical linguistics in the United States.

Pinker, Steven. 1994. *The language instinct: How the mind creates language*. New York: HarperCollins. This is an introduction to language from the perspective of theoretical linguistics.

About Fieldwork

Bohannan, Laura. 1966. Shakespeare in the bush. *Natural History* 75 (August/September): 28–33. This classic essay explores the idea of universal themes and cultural relativity.

Lee, Richard. 1969. Eating Christmas in the Kalahari. *Natural History* 78 (December): 14, 16, 18, 21–22, 60–63. This essay explores coming to terms with teasing in a fieldwork situation.

Mitchell, William E. 1988. A goy in the ghetto: Gentile-Jewish communication in fieldwork research. In *Between two worlds: Ethnographic essays on American Jewry*, ed. Jack Kugelmass, 225–39. New York: Cornell University Press. This is an account of doing fieldwork in the United States and learning to negotiate differences in communicative style.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Readings

The workbook/reader for this book has readings that can help you to further explore and understand the issues introduced in this chapter.

Exercises

Exercises in the workbook/reader will assist you in understanding the issues introduced in this chapter and in further exploring the intersection between language and other areas of study.

Web Exercises

The companion website for this book has a series of links designed to help you explore anthropological fieldwork in greater depth and to better understand the ethical issues raised by anthropological fieldwork. The companion website also contains study questions to help you to review important concepts.

Guided Projects

Two guided projects are designed to work with this book. In one, you will create a new language; in the other, you will learn to work with someone whose first language is different from your own. Both are semester-long projects. Your instructor will be your guide for these projects.

CHAPTER 2

Language and Culture

In the Field, Somewhere over Oklahoma, December 2001

“Remind me again, who is it that we are going to see first?” asked Loubnat, as we sipped our drinks and ate our peanuts on the airplane. We were halfway to Arizona, where my mother’s sister lived and where we were going to spend the night before traveling on to visit my husband’s relatives in New Mexico. Loubnat was a Comorian student at Kansas State University, and I had promised her parents that I would look after her and help her to adjust to American life. She was, in a way, my daughter.

“My mother,” I said, deciding to use Shinswani kinship terminology, even though we were speaking English. I was curious to see what would happen.

There was a pause as Loubnat absorbed my response. She knew full well that my mother, my biological mother, my “real” mother in English kinship terminology, lived in New York, yet here we were en route to Arizona and New Mexico. What was going on?

Loubnat is a sharp cookie, and she figured me out almost immediately. “Your mother *how*?” she asked, joining the game with a smile.

“My mother’s sister,” I responded, smiling back.

“OK,” she said, “I get it.” And we had a private laugh together.

We had just successfully created, and played, a unique kind of cross-cultural game. It was a game in which we were both using Shinswani cultural frames of reference, but speaking English. It was only possible because both of us knew both cultures and both languages, and the similarities and differences between them. The game was especially fun because of the way that it highlighted the complex interrelationship between language and culture for each of us.

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HOW LANGUAGE REFLECTS CULTURE

Anthropologists have always been fascinated by the complex interrelationship between language and culture. Different languages appear to encapsulate different worldviews, as anyone who has tried to translate between languages will agree. Some languages have words for things that others do not, and most languages divide up and name the world differently from one another. Franz Boas, widely acknowledged as the founder of American anthropology, must have encountered such differences in immigrating from Germany to the United States. It is probably one reason why he argued that ethnographers should learn and use the language of the people they were working with rather than trying to do their research through interpreters.

Working among Yupik (Inuit) speakers of central Canada, in the 1880s, Boas noted the relatively large number of distinct words for such things as snow, ice, and seals. Words for seals, for example, distinguished between male and female, older and younger, and even specific location (e.g., basking in the sun, floating on ice). In American English, where these distinctions are not part of the everyday culture, there is just one basic word for seals of all sorts and qualifying words and phrases are added to make further distinctions (e.g., bull seal, cow seal, circus seal, seal in the zoo).

Some Inuit Words for 'Seal' and for 'Snow'

natchiq	seal (or hair seal)	aniu	packed snow
kiieaaq	male seal in mating season	mixik	very soft snow
tiggafniq	strong smelling bull seal	natibvik	snowdrift
qaibutlik	ringed seal	mavsa	snowdrift overhang, ready to fall
ugruk	bearded seal	nutabaq	fresh snow, powder snow
		pukak	sugar snow
		sitxiq	hard crusty snow

Source: www.alaskool.org



WEBLINK To locate sources for Inuit words for seal and snow, go to academic.cengage.com/anthropology/ottenheimer2e.

Looking at these Inuit words for seals and for snow you can see that each word is very different from each other word. There does not seem to be any core part of the 'seal' words, for example, that repeats in all of the other 'seal' words and could be said to be carrying the essential

meaning of 'seal'. The different 'snow' words seem to vary just as much. All of the 'seal' words and all of the 'snow' words look as different from one another as the English words 'seal' and 'snow' look from each other. You can also see that it takes several words in English to translate (or 'gloss') each Inuit word. That is because English is a language that tends to put separate ideas into separate words. Linguists call languages like this 'isolating' languages. English has very few words that combine ideas (*snowdrift* happens to be one of them). Inuit, in contrast, is a language that tends to put strings of ideas into long words. Linguists call these languages 'agglutinating' languages. It is possible, therefore, that an Inuit 'word' might actually be equivalent to a short phrase or even a whole sentence in a language like English. We will have more to say about this in Chapter 4, but for the moment it is important to know that the distinction between words, phrases, and sentences is often quite different in different languages. Learning another language, then, also means learning how it organizes ideas into words, phrases, and sentences. It's another reason why it is important for anthropologists to learn and do their research in the languages of the people they are working with. German, by the way, which was Boas's first language, tends to do quite a bit more agglutinating than does English, but not as much as Inuit does, so it is particularly interesting that he recorded the various Inuit expressions for snow and seals as separate words.

Boas's study is occasionally misquoted or misunderstood. Some writers mistakenly suggest that Inuit have hundreds of words for snow, for example, when in fact there are perhaps only a few dozen different words, and some writers use the fact that Inuit have more 'snow' words to suggest that they might be somehow more 'exotic' because their language is so 'different'. You probably have encountered examples of magazine or newspaper or website articles like this, suggesting that speakers of other languages are somehow very different from the rest of us because of how they divide up and talk about the world. We will discuss this later in this chapter, as well as in several other chapters. In any event, Boas's study of Inuit words remains a classic example of one way in which language seems to reflect culture.

Cultural Emphasis

The complete vocabulary of a language may indeed be looked upon as a complex inventory of all the ideas, interests, and occupations that take up the attention of the community. EDWARD SAPIR

The idea that language reflects the culture of its speakers suggests also that areas of linguistic emphasis, such as those in the Inuit example, reflect areas of **cultural emphasis**. In other words, if there are lots of different words for snow in a language, then snow is probably an important

aspect of the culture of the speakers of that language—an area of cultural emphasis.

For American anthropologists, the idea that vocabulary reflects cultural emphasis has become an accepted axiom, and anthropologists in the field make a point of learning how different cultures divide up and name the world. Examples of how different cultures name body parts, kin, and colors are standard fare in anthropology textbooks, and such terminological differences are linked to differences in cultural emphasis. For example, the fact that Russian has a single word, *ruka*, for a part of the body that English divides into two words, *hand* and *arm*, suggests that the speakers of Russian and English attach different degrees of importance to naming these body parts (see Figure 2.1). Would it surprise you to learn that Russian also uses a single word for foot and leg?

Here's another example. In Shinzwani (spoken in the Comoro Islands) there is a single word, *mama*, for kin that in English are divided into two categories, *mother* and *aunt*. In this case, the kinship terminology reflects a difference in how people interact with these relatives; speakers of Shinzwani expect to relate to their aunts in the same way that they relate to their mothers and can be disciplined by either relative in pretty much the same way. English speakers, in contrast, interact quite differently with their aunts and mothers, reserving the phrase

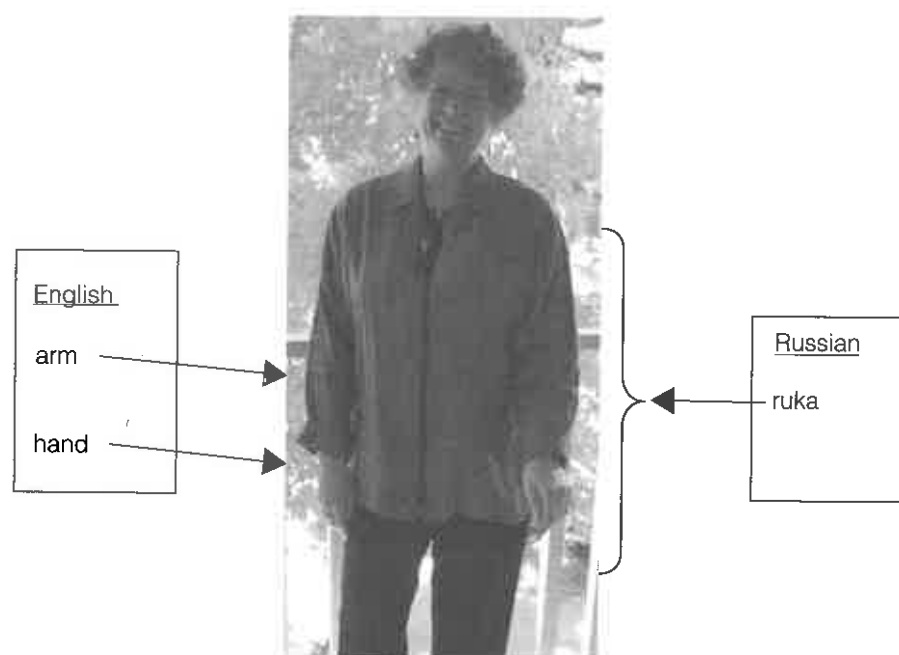


FIGURE 2.1 Comparison of word ranges for English *hand* and *arm* versus Russian *ruka*

“she’s just like a mother to me” for especially close aunts. In contrast, English speakers use a single term, *cousin*, while in many languages male and female cousins are distinguished by different terms: *cousin* and *cousine* in French, for example, or *bratranec* and *sestřenice* in Czech. It should be clear from these examples how different languages can reflect differences in cultural emphasis.

Different Kin Term Systems for ‘Mother’, ‘Aunt’, and ‘Cousin’ in Shinzwani, Czech, French, and English

Shinzwani	Czech	French	English
mama	matka	mère	mother
mama	teta	tante	aunt
mmemwananya	bratranec	cousin	cousin
mshemwananya	sestřenice	cousine	cousin

Still another example comes from the Marshall Islands, in the Pacific Ocean, where an extensive series of nuclear tests were carried out in the 1940s and 50s. Marshallese have developed an elaborate “radiation language” to describe their experiences with these tests. Part of this new language has been developed by women to describe new birthing problems that they are having. Before nuclear testing only two words, *jibun* and *ko*, appear to have existed in Marshallese to describe birthing problems. Both words referred to infants that were stillborn. These two words are still part of the contemporary Marshallese birthing vocabulary, but now many new words have come into use. Some have been borrowed from English, like *kiraap* ‘grape’ (to describe a fetus that resembles a cluster of grapes), and others are indigenous Marshallese words whose meanings have been extended. Indigenous words for things like jellyfish, marlin, turtle, and octopus, for example, are now routinely used to describe newborn infants that are deformed in various ways (Barker 2004, 109–10). You can see how this new, expanded birthing vocabulary reflects new realities in the Marshall Islands. The aftermath of nuclear testing has become an important cultural emphasis in these islands and the Marshallese language has changed to reflect these new concerns.

The linguistic reflection of cultural emphasis can also be seen in different varieties of a single language. Growing up in New York City, for example, I learned a complex vocabulary for negotiating my way around the city in subways and buses, distinguishing verbally between locals and expresses, IRTs and BMTs, D trains and A trains, F trains, and more. After I moved to Kansas, I found that I no longer needed this level of specificity and could just refer to *subways* or *buses* in my conversations about transportation. When I learned to sail, in contrast, I found that the word *sailboat* was no longer sufficient for conversations with sailors; I needed a new set of words to distinguish different kinds of sailboats, such as *yacht*, *yawl*, *ketch*, *catboat*, *catamaran*, and *dinghy*,

as well as different kinds of boat parts, such as *gooseneck*, *boomkicker*, *pintle*, *gudgeon*, *clam cleat*, *jam cleat*, and so on. Different cultural emphases, different vocabularies. There's a good chance that people who ski have more words and descriptive phrases for kinds of snow than the Inuit do (see Figure 2.2).

From Cultural Emphasis to Ethnosemantics

We learn much of a culture when we learn the system of meanings for which its linguistic forms stand. Much descriptive ethnography is inescapably an exercise in descriptive semantics. WARD GOODENOUGH

If we agree that different cultural emphases are reflected in different degrees of specificity of vocabulary, then the next step is to note that different vocabularies might reflect something deeper than differences of cultural emphasis. Different degrees of specificity might actually reflect something about the ways that speakers carve up their worlds. If that were so, then perhaps we could use languages to gain insight into how their speakers perceive and categorize the world around them. In the 1950s and 60s anthropologists began exploring these questions in earnest, trying to see how the words that people used for describing specific areas of experience revealed underlying systems of meaning and perception. This approach to ethnographic research was variously termed



FIGURE 2.2 Words for different varieties of fish reveal an important emphasis in Taiwanese cuisine.

ethnosemantics, **ethnoscience**, **cognitive anthropology**, or even “the new ethnography.” One of the seminal contributions to this new approach was anthropologist Ward Goodenough’s 1956 paper on kinship terminology in the Pacific Ocean island of Truk in which he laid out its basic premises, explaining its linguistic underpinnings and its potential for understanding cultural meanings in terms of semantic categories.

The idea of ethnosemantics was to explore, as thoroughly as possible, the way a specific area of cultural emphasis (or **semantic domain**) was divided up and named. The assumption was made that a complete and detailed representation of all of the words for a particular subject (such as fish, or colors, or diseases, or plants) would constitute an accurate picture of the categorization system of the speakers of a language. It was further argued that the **categorization system** encapsulated in the language, or the way a language categorizes items, was an actual model, or image, of the mental map that speakers had of that particular part of the world. So a depiction of all of the words for plants, for example, including the way each word related to each other word, could be assumed to be an **ethnoscience model**, or a **mental map**, or, in other words, an indigenous scientific categorization system of plants for the culture in question. If, for example, both you and I identify and name dandelions, but in your culture dandelions are a kind of lettuce and can be put into salad and in my culture dandelions are a kind of weed and must be dug out of lawns and gardens and thrown away, then we can be said to have two very different ethnosemantic views of dandelions and two very different mental maps of the world of plants (see Figure 2.3).

Ethnosemantics as a Field Method

Although there are questions about whether sets of words really yield mental maps or just elegant models, the value of ethnosemantics for learning about cultures, as well as languages, is clear. Ethnosemantics can help you to learn precise, culturally informed meanings for sets of words and is therefore a great way to get off to a rapid start in learning and understanding the nuances of a new language and culture (see Doing Linguistic Anthropology 2.1: Speaking “Computer”). It is also an



FIGURE 2.3 Two mental maps for dandelions

Doing Linguistic Anthropology 2.1



SPEAKING "COMPUTER"

I had begun keeping a dictionary of Shizwani in the 1960s, and by the 1980s I realized that the project had become too large to maintain by hand any longer. It was time to transfer the materials to a computer. I found a set of computer programs called LEXWARE that promised not only to keep track of all of the words but also to sort them in as many ways as I wanted. The programs were installed on my university's mainframe computer, and I began learning the "job-control language" I needed to use. Note that this was before PCs and PC programs were widespread; large jobs were done on mainframe computers, and instructions for each job had to be written for the mainframe using either punch cards or "dumb terminals." My guide was patient, but I was hopeless. Even my questions made no sense. The language seemed impenetrable. It sounded like English but it was frustratingly different. Familiar words had different meanings and were used in ways that made no sense to me.

Finally, in desperation, I decided to try an ethnosemantic analysis. Instead of asking for definitions of words, I decided to try to build a taxonomy of the entire semantic domain of job-control language. Every time my guide used a new (to me) word, I stopped him and asked what it was a "kind of" and whether there were any other words that fit into that same category. Gradually, I got a better sense of the overall picture and of how to string appropriate sets of words together into sentences. I was delighted (and so was my guide) when I finally was able to form a question that "made sense," and I almost thought I understood the answer. After several weeks of ethnosemantic fieldwork, I was finally ready to run my data on the mainframe computer!

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excellent way to learn how to communicate effectively in a new language and culture, helping you to learn how to put words into the right order and place in a sentence and how to construct appropriate sentences. For example, once I know that dandelions are a kind of lettuce in your language, I am less likely to offer to weed the dandelions out of your garden. In addition to feeling as though we are using each other's language correctly, we will also have a sense of understanding one another's categorization systems more completely. This has been called getting an "emic," or insider, view of the world, in contrast to an "etic," or outsider, view of the world. Chapter 3 explains etics and emics more fully.

To the anthropologists of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, it made good sense to use ethnosemantics in their fieldwork. Not only did it help them to learn a language and culture, but it also gave them deeper insights into the way that the language seemed to map out the underlying categorization systems in the culture. They called this new linguistic-based ethnosemantic field method the **new ethnography**, to emphasize its difference from older established kinds of ethnography. An **ethnography** is a study of a culture, and in most cases an anthropologist researching a culture and writing an ethnography about it learns the language(s) spoken by the members of that culture. In most older ethnographies, however, language learning was seen as necessary so that one could converse with speakers in their 'native' languages; language was rarely a key focus of the research. In the new ethnography, though, language became the primary focus of the research. Language was seen as a way to discover how members of a culture viewed and organized the world around them. It was regarded as a key to the underlying structure of the culture itself.

Although a brief description of ethnosemantics is provided here, to give a sense of how it works, the workbook/reader accompanying this book gives a more detailed discussion and suggests a project to try. To analyze language using the methodology of ethnosemantics you need to first identify a specific **semantic domain**, or area of meaning (plants, for example). Next, you collect as many words as possible from that semantic domain (all the different plant words that people can think of, for example). Then, you try to build a **taxonomy** for those words (see Figure 2.3 for examples), showing how the words are related to one another (*lettuce* and *weeds* are kinds of *plants*, for example, and the word *plants*



Harriet Ottenheimer

FIGURE 2.4 Shizwani speaker Nounou Affane helps anthropologist Martin Ottenheimer to learn the correct names for varieties of bananas and papayas.

Doing Linguistic Anthropology 2.2

LANGUAGE ON THE JOB

A student in my linguistic anthropology class at Kansas State University decided to explore the underlying categorization system at the heavy industrial company for which she worked. She interviewed one of the workers at the company, collecting terms for equipment and tools; then she collated the terms into a taxonomy and analyzed the semantic relationships among the terms. She decided to present her findings to the company, with the suggestion that job safety could be improved if the categorization system that the workers had developed were adopted as part of the training manual for new workers. The management reviewed its training program, incorporated the workers' system into the manual, and found that on-the-job injuries decreased as a result. The student got a promotion and a bonus (and an A on her project). (Because this student wishes to remain anonymous, no further detail can be given here about this project.)

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includes both *lettuce* and *weeds* in its meaning). Finally, a **componential analysis** (also called a **feature analysis** or a **contrast analysis**) reveals the culturally important features by which speakers of the language distinguish different words in the domain (being edible, for example, is an important distinguishing feature of plants). This is an interesting way to learn a language as well as to gain insight into the culture of its speakers, and anthropologists who have pursued this approach have written some very interesting and insightful ethnographies, especially of American subcultures (see Doing Linguistic Anthropology 2.2: Language on the Job). It is not as mechanical as it sounds, and often it takes many months of research before you learn all the words you need and all the pieces fall into place. Ethnographies of this sort, analyzing specific semantic domains, were especially popular in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, and they opened up windows into the worlds of alcoholics (Spradley 1970), cocktail waitresses (Spradley and Mann 1975), and long-haul truckers (Agar 1986), resulting in better understandings of these different American ways of life. Although sometimes limited in focus, and a bit mechanical in style, ethnosemantics can give excellent insight into another culture or subculture and can help in learning another language or culture. Today, it is still a valuable approach to learning another language and the worldview that it reflects.

From Ethnosemantics to Prototype Theory

Ethnosemantics was one way to discover the cultural meanings of words, if by *meaning* you meant how words were defined in terms of how they fit into (and perhaps reflected) cultural categories in the languages of their speakers. But the difficulties of discovering and building accurate models of those categories in different languages led researchers to wonder how those categories were actually constructed in the minds of those who used them. What is it about a dandelion, for example, that determines whether it belongs in the category of *weeds* or the category of *lettuce*? Is it primarily the features that dandelions share with other kinds of weeds (persistence, pervasiveness), or is it the features they share with other kinds of lettuce (taste, greenness, crunchiness)? Is there a feature for 'edibility'? Or is it possible that dandelions are a special case, granted only marginal membership in the lettuce category?

Indeed, categories often are based on shared features and can be discovered through ethnosemantic analysis, but categorization turns out to be somewhat more complicated than that. In the 1970s and 80s linguists and anthropologists turned to a new theory of categorization called **prototype theory** to help explain these complications. Prototype theory, developed by cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch, suggests that categories can be graded and that some members of a category can be more central than others. The theory points out that if a category is defined only by the properties that all of its members share, then all members of the category must be equally good examples of that category (G. Lakoff 1987, 7). This means that dandelions should be just as good a member of the category of LETTUCE as is lettuce, a metal tray should be just as much a piece of FURNITURE as is a table. But they are not, at least in my own variety of English, where lettuce really *is* a better example than dandelion of the larger category of LETTUCE (and perhaps also of the even larger category of SALAD GREENS), and a table *is* a better example of FURNITURE than a metal tray. Prototype theory suggests that much of our experience is categorized in terms of prototypes, or 'best examples' of things, which are then used as cognitive reference points to determine the appropriate categories for other things (Rosch 1975).

Was my difficulty with getting a table in the Comoros (Chapter 1) a translation problem or a categorization problem? Does translation require knowing something about categorization schemes anyway? If a major feature of tables in the Comoros is 'something you eat on' and people eat on metal trays, then of course I am likely to get a metal tray to use as a table. If the major feature I am seeking in my table is 'something to write on', I still might not get a table with legs. I could just as easily get a lap-board to place on my knees. I would probably have had to specify 'desk' or 'table to write on' to communicate the category I was thinking of.

LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

Different languages vary in the semantic domains that they identify and in the distinctions made between those domains. They differ in the prototypes and taxonomies that they identify, and within taxonomies they differ in the number and range of levels in each taxonomy. Body parts, foods, diseases, kinfolk, colors, animals, furniture, and many more semantic domains are grouped and named differently in different languages. Further, each system of dividing the world and naming it appears to be arbitrary, in the sense that there does not seem to be any clear connection between the physical world being named and how it is divided up and named.

Take, for example, the words for *moon* and *sun* in French, German, and Dyirbal (a language spoken in Australia). Each of these languages has a system in which nouns are marked by some sort of classifier. French uses words like *le* and *la* to indicate a noun's category. German uses words like *der*, *die*, and *das* to indicate the category of its nouns. Dyirbal uses the four words *bayi*, *balan*, *balam*, and *bala* with its nouns. A comparison of these three languages, using their classifier words to indicate categories, reveals different placements of the words for *moon* and *sun*. In French *la lune* 'the moon' is classified with *la nuit* 'the night' and *la femme* 'the woman', while *le soleil* 'the sun' is classified with *le jour* 'the day' and *l'homme* 'the man' (note that *le* before *h* gets shortened to *l'*). In German *der Mond* 'the moon' is classified with *der Tag* 'the day' and *der Mann* 'the man', while *die Sonne* 'the sun' is classified with *die Nacht* 'the night' and *die Frau* 'the woman'. In Dyirbal the moon is classified with *bayi* words such as storms, rainbows, and men, while the sun is classified with *balan* words such as stars, water, fire, and women.

Is there anything inherently masculine or feminine about the sun or the moon? Not really. The categories are semantic, and a good linguistic anthropology question would be what might such categorizations tell you about the worldview of the people who speak each of these languages. Different systems are just different, and it is more efficient and productive to learn the differences than to try to figure out why the categories named by the language you are learning are not identical to those of the languages you already know. This idea, that languages are different, that they are arbitrary systems, and that knowing one language does not allow you to predict how another language will categorize and name the world, is referred to as **linguistic relativity**.

A classic example of linguistic relativity is the way different languages divide and name the rainbow of colors that appears when light is refracted through a prism. In American English, six colors are commonly identified and named: *red*, *orange*, *yellow*, *green*, *blue*, and *purple* (in earlier times, *purple* was called *violet*). If you learned the old ROY G. BIV mnemonic for the names of the colors you might now be asking what

happened to *indigo* (which used to be located between *blue* and *violet*). In fact, although the word *indigo* exists in English (much like *aqua* and *blue-green*), it may never have been a common part of the basic English color-naming system. The use of *indigo* to describe a color in the spectrum was suggested by Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and modeled after the Western system of musical notation, in which a scale contains seven notes. If there are seven notes, he argued, then there should also be seven colors. Although many of us are taught these seven color names in school, the mental maps of English speakers appear to contain only six basic colors. In fact, some English speakers classify colors into just three primary colors (*blue*, *yellow*, and *red*) and consider the colors called *green*, *orange*, and *purple* as secondary—made by combining the primary colors!

Linguistic Relativity and Cultural Emphasis

The ways in which different languages divide the world of color, and name colors, are dramatically different. Some languages combine 'blue' and 'green' under a single term (linguists have coined the English word *grue* to describe this larger color range). Others divide this range into even finer distinctions and more terms. Russian, for example, divides the color range that English calls 'blue' into two separate colors, *goluboy* 'light blue' and *sinii* 'dark blue'. In many cases there is a close link between primary color terms and cultural emphasis. This is what anthropologist Harold Conklin found in his now-classic study of Hanunóo (Philippines) color terms (1955, 341). The Hanunóo primary terms are as follows:

ma-bi:ru	'black, very dark colors (including dark blue)'
ma-lagti?	'white, very pale colors'
ma-latuy	'green, freshness, succulence'
ma-rara?	'red, dryness, desiccation'

These four terms provide a framework, or model, in which it is clear that the important contrastive features are lightness/darkness and freshness/dryness. Note that Hanunóo can refer to colors using more-descriptive phrases (e.g., ashy gray), but these four terms are primary. It should come as no surprise that plants and their condition form a cultural focus for the horticultural Hanunóo culture. The different terminological system for colors reflects a different view of the world.

Although the world of color seems to be a natural domain, and most humans appear to see the same spectrum of colors, the fact that the domain is carved up and named differently by different cultures indicates that the domain of color is not experienced exactly alike by all humans and that different cultures do in fact identify different ranges of color as significant within their unique cultural systems and name them accordingly. Different cultures divide and categorize the world around them differently. These different emphases are reflected in language.

Learning to speak another language well requires learning these different categorizations and emphases. The workbook/reader has some exercises you can do to explore and compare color-naming systems in your own and in other languages.

Challenging Linguistic Relativity: The Search for Universals

The idea of cultural relativity is occasionally challenged, as anthropologists wonder whether there are universal patterns underneath the cultural differences that they study. One such study, which focused on linguistic relativity, and on color-naming systems in particular, was conducted in 1969 by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay. Berlin and Kay thought that there might be some underlying universal pattern to the way that people experienced and named colors. They wondered whether different color-naming systems were really as different as they seemed. To study this question, they first asked speakers of different languages to name the words for primary or basic colors in their own languages and then to identify the focal points (and boundaries) of each of those basic color terms on a standard color chart.



WEBLINK To review a Hale color chart that is used for researching color naming in different languages, go to academic.cengage.com/anthropology/ottenheimer2e.

Comparing the focal points of color terms across a sample of different languages (the reddest red in each system, the bluest blue, and so on), Berlin and Kay suggested that all languages had a common underlying system for identifying and naming colors. They also suggested that systems with more terms for colors were evolutionarily more “advanced” than those with fewer terms for colors. Here is the sequence by which terms for colors were thought to emerge.

- Stage 1. Languages with two color terms (black and white)
- Stage 2. Languages with three color terms (black, white, and red)
- Stage 3. Languages with four color terms (black, white, red, and green or yellow)
- Stage 4. Languages with five color terms (black, white, red, green, and yellow)
- Stage 5. Languages with six color terms (black, white, red, green, yellow, and blue)
- Stage 6. Languages with seven color terms (stage 5 colors plus brown)
- Stage 7. Languages with eight or more color terms (stage 6 colors plus purple, pink, orange and/or gray)

Berlin and Kay noted that many of the stage 1, 2, and 3 color systems are found in languages spoken by technologically “simple” socie-

ties, while stage 7 systems are found only in modern industrialized societies (Berlin and Kay 1969). The study was later revised to make some of the stages more flexible, to acknowledge that some colors appeared in different orders in different stages, and to account for languages with a single term for ‘blue’ and ‘green’, using the term *grue* to describe this color range.

A continuing problem with Berlin and Kay’s approach to analyzing color-naming systems is the uneven way in which they apply their definition of basic color terms. For example, according to Berlin and Kay, a basic color term should not also be the name of an object of the same color. If this is so, however, then they should not have included the English words, *orange* (an orange is a kind of fruit) and *pink* (a pink is a kind of flower) in the list of basic color terms of English. They also said that basic color terms should not be borrowed words, but this means that the English words *brown*, *gray*, *purple*, and *blue* (all borrowed from French) should not be counted in the set of basic color terms for English. If the rules were applied to English in this way, then English would end up with five basic color terms and would be classified as a stage 4 language rather than at the top of the scale, as Berlin and Kay had it.

A greater difficulty with the research on color-naming systems is the fact that there really *is* some physical variation in color perception that the research did not allow for. Cataracts, for example, have an effect on color perception. The more developed the cataract, the yellower things become, so that a person with well-developed cataracts will see blue-green as mostly green, while a person with no cataracts will see blue-green as blue-green. As long as there is no universally accepted standard defining the focal points and boundaries of various colors on a spectrum in terms of some absolute measure (like the system of standards for linear measures, where calibration materials are kept in a vault and used as a template against which you can measure your own yardstick for accuracy, or agreement with the standard), there is no way to really measure color perception and how it varies among individuals and cultures. As a result, the study, as well as similar searches for linguistic universals, remains controversial and perhaps fundamentally unprovable.



THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON CULTURE

The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. EDWARD SAPIR

Recall that the relationship between language and culture is complex. It is relatively easy to talk about how different languages carve up and name the world differently (*linguistic relativity*). It is far more difficult

to know whether this is because people of different cultures perceive the world differently and thus talk about it accordingly or because the languages that people speak actually *cause* them to perceive the world around them differently. This second view, that your language affects, even determines, your ability to perceive and think about things, as well as to talk about them, is referred to as **linguistic determinism**.

Many scholars have wrestled with the concept of linguistic determinism, including philosophers, psychologists, and anthropologists. However, two individuals remain primary in terms of influencing the way anthropologists (and others) think about the subject. These are Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941). Both men worked primarily with Native American languages. Edward Sapir was a student of Franz Boas, and Benjamin Lee Whorf was a student of Edward Sapir.

Recall that Boas was an early proponent of linguistic relativity, arguing that each language had to be studied on its own terms. Sapir took this concept further, suggesting that although words and categories might be initially based on experience, once they had become a part of a linguistic system, they would then be more likely to be “imposed on it because of the tyrannical hold that linguistic form has upon our orientation in the world” (Sapir 1931, 578). In other words, our language can determine our experience of the world.

Sapir’s thinking and teaching had a profound impact on Benjamin Lee Whorf. Whorf was a fire insurance inspector, working for an insurance agency in Connecticut. His interest in linguistics was sparked by his observations on the job. During investigations he discovered that workers were scrupulously careful around full gasoline drums but fairly careless around empty ones. If you throw a lighted match into a drum full of gasoline the gasoline will simply burn. Empty gasoline drums are another matter entirely; they are full of gasoline vapors. Throwing a lighted match into an “empty” gasoline drum will cause the vapors in the drum to explode! Whorf interpreted the workers’ behavior around gasoline drums as conditioned by the words they used to describe them. In particular, he thought, the word *empty* was signaling that something was not dangerous, that it was in fact innocuous. (The in-flight explosion of a TWA airplane in the late 1990s may be attributed to exactly the same linguistic effect; electrical wires passing through “empty” fuel chambers appear to have shorted out, sparking and causing the explosion.)

Whorf began attending Sapir’s classes in linguistic anthropology at Yale University in the fall of 1931 and was fascinated by what he found. Studying Native American languages, in particular Hopi, Nootka, and Shawnee, he concentrated on attempting to describe the relationship between language, thought, and perception. Developing what he called his **principle of linguistic relativity**, he suggested that “users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward differ-

ent types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world” (Whorf 1940/1956, 221). In other words, if different languages possessed different grammatical categories, then those categories should *oblige* speakers to think along certain lines, as laid out by the categories, and make it more difficult (perhaps even impossible?) for them to think in ways not provided by those categories.

For example, the Hopi verb system creates verbs of repeated or prolonged action by making a simple addition to single-action verbs:

Hopi Single-Action and Repeated- or Prolonged-Action Verbs

Single-action verb		Repeated/enduring-action verb	
róya	‘it makes a turn’	royáyata	‘it is rotating’
tíri	‘he gives a start’	tirírta	‘he is trembling’
wíwa	‘he stumbles’	wiwáwata	‘he is hobbling along’
kʷíla	‘he takes a step forward’	kʷilálata	‘he walks forward’
rípi	‘it flashes’	ripípita	‘it is sparkling’
ʔími	‘it makes a bang’	ʔimímita	‘it is thundering’
ngáro	‘his teeth strike something hard’	ngarórota	‘he is chewing on something hard’

Data from Trask (1995, 62)

English speakers, Whorf would argue, perceive actions such as *stumbling* and *hobbling along* as two different activities because they use two different and unrelated verbs, while Hopi speakers perceive them as related aspects of a single activity, much as English speakers might sense *he stumbles* and *he stumbled* as related aspects of a single activity. The result is that Hopi and English speakers would need to be doubly careful about how they described such motions to one another or they might make mistakes in communicating.

Although never formulated as a hypothesis by either man, the concept of linguistic determinism became variously known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, the **Whorf-Sapir hypothesis**, or even just the **Whorfian hypothesis**. The idea has come down to us in two basic forms: “Strong Whorf” and “Weaker Whorf.” Anthropologist Michael Agar suggests that **Strong Whorf** might be compared to the idea that language is a prison, providing no escape (i.e., absolute linguistic determinism), while **Weaker Whorf** might be compared to the idea that language is a room, which provides you with specific ways of seeing but you can leave the room, enter other rooms, and return to your original room, shifting perspectives as you go (i.e., much closer to the idea of linguistic relativity) (Agar 1994).

Testing Linguistic Determinism

Of course, the Strong Whorf form of linguistic determinism is impossible to test. If your language forces you to think and perceive in only certain ways, then there is no way you can get outside your linguistic system to test whether it is determining your perceptions. The fact that we can and do translate fairly successfully between different languages and that we coin new words and modify our grammatical patterns over time suggests that the strong form of linguistic determinism cannot be accurate. The Weaker Whorf form of linguistic determinism, however, appears more amenable to testing, and there have been several attempts to do so over the years.

One of these attempts that is especially interesting is John Lucy's comparison of Yucatec and English speakers with regard to shape and material. In Yucatec, a language from Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, the word *che'* can be used to create additional words for objects such as trees, sticks, and planks, all of which are made out of wood but are of different shapes. In contrast, in English, objects made of a single material are generally given unrelated labels. In English, for example, objects made of wood might be labeled *tree*, *stick*, *plank*, *table*, *chair*, *shelf*, *desk*, and so on. (Another example of this tendency in English, noted by Boas, is the way that English labels different shapes of water differently, using words such as *lake*, *river*, *stream*, *creek*, or *ocean*.) Focusing on this difference, Lucy hypothesized that "*English speakers should attend relatively more to the shape of objects.*" He also hypothesized that "*Yucatec speakers should attend relatively more to the material composition of objects in other cognitive activities*" (1992a, 89, emphasis in the original). When Yucatec and English speakers were asked to recognize and remember pictures of items, the results showed that they did indeed group objects differently: Yucatec speakers grouped items in terms of common *material*, while English speakers grouped items in terms of common *shape*. As Lucy concluded, "These patterns suggest strongly that the underlying lexical structures . . . in the two languages have an influence on the non-verbal interpretation of objects" (1992a, 144).

Recent research into the differences between Russian and English speakers regarding the color blue has revealed similar effects of language on perception. Recall that Russian speakers divide the color range that English calls 'blue' into *goluboy* 'light blue' and *siniy* 'dark blue'. When Russian and English speakers were presented with sets of three blue squares, two of which were identical and one of which was a different shade of blue, and asked to pick out the identical squares, the Russian speakers performed the task much more quickly and easily when the two different shades of blue crossed their boundary between *goluboy* and *siniy* than when all three shades fell into one or the other of these two hues. English speakers did not show such a distinction (Hopkin 2007).

Relative Space and Absolute Space: New Evidence for Linguistic Determinism

There is no such striking difference between Hopi and [English] about space as about time, and probably the apprehension of space is given in substantially the same form by experience irrespective of language. BENJAMIN LEE WHORF

In contrast to time or color, the way we experience space appears to be biologically based, rather than linguistically influenced. We organize and name the space around us in terms of our own bodies, using words and concepts such as UP-DOWN, FRONT-BACK, and LEFT-RIGHT projecting outward from our own bodies as we name the directions in which we might point or find things. Linguists call these ideas *deictic*, or pointing, concepts. Such deictic concepts have, until recently, appeared to be universally egocentric. Ironically, an egocentric deictic system results in a relativistic spatial reckoning system. Items are located relative to your own body; to your left or right, to your front or your back, and so on. Absolute reckoning systems exist, but they have always been seen as special-purpose systems, for navigating your way around on a boat, for example (where *starboard* is always on the right side of the boat, no matter which way you are facing), or for navigating across oceans (where the North Star is always to the north, no matter where in the world you are).

So it has come as something of a surprise then to discover that in some languages absolute reckoning systems appear to be standard, rather than relativistic (body centered) systems that use concepts like *left* and *right*. Guugu-Yimidhirr, spoken in northeastern Australia, is one such language. Although Guugu-Yimidhirr does have words for *left* and *right*, these words seem to be used only for a speaker's own body parts, and not for other items that are to someone's left or right. Instead, the language provides four linguistic forms, *gunggaarr*, *dyibarr*, *naga*, and *guwa*, to represent four spatial quadrants that correspond roughly to *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west*. Each quadrant is fixed relative to the earth, rather than to the orientation of a person standing on the earth. This means that if I am facing north and there is a tree in front of me, I would tell you that the tree is *gunggaarr*. If I then turn around and face south, or *dyibarr*, even though the tree is now behind me, I would still tell you that the tree is *gunggaarr* (Haviland 1993).

The Guugu-Yimidhirr deictic system provides a perfect opportunity to test the question of linguistic influence on experience, and indeed recent experiments comparing Guugu-Yimidhirr and Dutch speakers found that the words used to describe spatial relations in these two languages affected speakers' experiences of space. Ten Guugu-Yimidhirr speakers were driven through the bush via various circuitous routes and then were asked to point to an out-of-sight location. Their direction was off by an average of only thirteen compass degrees (or less than

4 percent), showing that Guugu-Yimidhirr speakers use a fixed mental map that reflects the four quadrants of their territory. Dutch speakers, given the same sort of task, erred by an average of ninety compass degrees, or an entire compass quadrant. It would be as if you had asked me to point to something that was directly north and I had pointed directly east instead (Levinson 1992).

Guugu-Yimidhirr is not the only language in the world with a geographically, rather than biologically, based deictic system. Tzeltal (Mayan) speakers in the Yucatán Peninsula use topographic features (UPHILL-DOWNHILL) to describe and point to things. Experiments have shown that this feature of their language affects how they describe and interact with things in their world. So, for example, if I place a cup and a bowl in front of you on a table, such that the cup is closer to you than the bowl, and then I ask you to turn around and place another cup and bowl on another table the same way the other two items were placed, if you speak English you are likely to again place the cup closer to you than the bowl, whereas if you are a Tzeltal speaker you are likely to place the bowl closer to you than the cup (Lucy 1997).

Experiments such as these, as focused as they are, are a clear indication that language does have some small effect on how we react to our environment. There are even some examples from English that suggest that fixed deictic systems are in use in some parts of the United States. My own experience in moving from New York, where directions seem to be relative to the direction you are facing (go three blocks straight ahead, the house will be on your left), to New Orleans, where fixed concepts such as UPTOWN-DOWNTOWN and LAKESIDE-RIVERSIDE are used (go three blocks uptown, the house will be on the uptown, riverside corner), then to the Comoros where directions are given both biologically and geographically (go three blocks toward the ocean, the house will be on your left), and then ultimately to Kansas, where directions are often given in terms of compass points (go three blocks south, the house will be on the southeast corner) suggests that the language you use does indeed affect the way you talk about, and perhaps also experience, the world (see Cross-Language Miscommunication 2.1: Up and Down).

Experiencing Linguistic Determinism

What is important to recognize, even more than the idea that you might think or perceive the world differently depending on the language you speak, is that before you can really use a new language comfortably, without thinking about what you are saying, you need to wrap your mind around the new concepts that the new language is presenting to you. For example, in order to use Shizwani fluently, and to talk about something being *meza-juu* 'at/on the table', I need to actually comprehend that it

Cross-Language Miscommunication 2.1



UP AND DOWN

I will never forget how surprised I was when a visiting ethnomusicologist from Sudan demonstrated the notes on his 'ud. An 'ud is a lot like a lute, and in fact contemporary 'uds and lutes developed from the same ancestral instrument. The neck of an 'ud is a lot like the neck on a guitar. I had studied guitar in high school and still played a bit, so when the ethnomusicologist started down the neck of the 'ud, playing different notes as he went, I was prepared to hear a scale going from low- to high-pitched notes. It was the words that he used as he began his ascent up the scale that caught me off guard. He told us he was going *down* the scale, rather than up as I had expected. It was my first exposure to the idea that UP and DOWN were not universal concepts, and it stayed with me for a long time. The lecturer was moving his hand *down* the neck of the 'ud from the farthest-out part to the body of the instrument so it made some sense to me that the notes produced could be called "lower" even though my own European-style musical training had taught me to think of those notes as "higher." It got me wondering, too, why it is that when you play an upright instrument like a 'cello or a string bass and you physically move your hand down the neck of the instrument you still talk about producing "higher" notes and about going "up" the scale. I regret that I didn't get time to talk with the lecturer about these linguistic and musical differences. At least the experience helped me to become more aware of the fact that concepts like UP and DOWN may not be based on our physical or bodily experiences of the world.

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doesn't matter whether something is *at* the table or *on* the table—I can just use the phrase *mezajuu* to say "I am sitting **at the table**" (*nikukentsi mezajuu*) and "the plate is **on the table**" (*shisahani sha mezajuu*). Note that *mezajuu* is the same in each expression. Also note that *meza* means 'table' (it was borrowed from Portuguese) and that *juu* means 'at/on'. Understanding this is probably easier when the language you are learning combines things that you are used to keeping separate. It is probably more difficult when the language you are learning separates things you are used to combining. In learning Shizwani, for example, I needed to learn to distinguish *masinza* 'eating bananas' (i.e., ripe bananas for eating) from *ntrovi* 'cooking bananas' (i.e., green bananas for cooking)

and to remember when to use which word, even though most bananas looked the same to me.

Here's another example. While Standard English separates *lend* and *borrow*, Shizwani uses one word, *kopa*, for both actions. English-speaking learners of Shizwani need only adjust to speaking about a generalized concept of transfer, regardless of the direction. Shizwani speakers learning English, however, have the more difficult challenge of separating this general concept into two different actions, based on the direction of the transfer. If the item is being given to someone, then the owner *lends* it. For example, *You lend (give) a book to me*, and *I lend (give) a book to you*. Conversely, if the item is being taken from the owner, then someone *borrow*s it. *I borrow (take) a book from you*, and *You borrow (take) a book from me*.

Yet another example comes from Ukrainian, which has two different words for love. *Liubov* 'love' (in general) and *kokhannia* 'romantic love'. An English speaker would have to be careful to separate out the two different meanings of love when speaking Ukrainian and to choose the right word. Can you imagine slipping up and saying that you romantically love (*kokhannia*) chocolate chip ice cream? Ukrainians speaking English could use the English word 'love' for either word, but they might feel that they were losing something in translation. The English word 'love' just doesn't convey the specificity, nor the sense of passion, that comes with the Ukrainian *kokhannia*, but using the English phrase 'romantic love' seems awkward somehow. And while we are talking about translation, I should point out that friends of mine who live in former Soviet Union countries point out that it is difficult to translate the English word 'privacy' into many languages in those countries, suggesting, yet again, that if you don't have a word for something, it is difficult to comprehend the concept that word represents, let alone talk about it.

One more example, which brings us back to the question of time that Whorf explored. When I am speaking English, I say that 9:15 is a *quarter past nine*, 9:30 is *half past nine*, and 9:45 is a *quarter of (or a quarter to) ten*. When I began learning Czech, I found that 9:15 is a phrase that translates to 'a quarter of ten', 9:30 is 'half of ten', and 9:45 is 'three-quarters of ten'. This puzzled me for a while, and I had to double-check every appointment I made. Once I figured out the underlying difference between the two systems, however, I found myself thinking about time differently depending on whether I was using English or Czech. In English I think about the hour that has just sounded on the clock (a quarter past nine, half past nine, at least for the first half of the hour) and in Czech I think about the hour that is coming up next (one-quarter of the way to ten, half of the way to ten, three-quarters of the way to ten). I'm not sure if this indicates that Czechs are more future oriented than

Americans or that Americans are always thinking about the past rather than the future, but it certainly does suggest a difference, and people who are not careful could confuse times and miss appointments. The interesting thing is that even as a beginner I found myself thinking differently when I used these two different languages.

Different Ways of Talking about Clock Time in Czech and in English

Time	Czech	English
9:15	čtvrt na deset 'a quarter of ten'	a quarter past nine
9:30	půl desáté 'a half of ten'	half past nine
9:45	tři čtvrtě na deset 'three-quarters of ten'	a quarter to (of) ten

People who speak only one language think that it is confusing to speak different languages and think in different ways. Research, as well as experience, suggests that this is not so. In fact, some individuals, such as professional interpreters and translators, have developed language-switching to a high art. Of course, it can be confusing if you are stuck in one language and worldview and everyone else is using another one. That would be something like constantly wondering how much something weighs in kilos when everyone else is talking in terms of pounds (or vice versa). Although it might seem obvious, it is really simpler to use the categories of whatever language you are speaking and not worry about how they translate into any of the other languages that you might know. It also saves a lot of energy.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND THOUGHT

What Categories Tell You about the Mind

Human categorization is essentially a matter of both human experience and imagination—of perception, motor activity, and culture on the one hand, and of metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery on the other. GEORGE LAKOFF

So does language influence the way you think about the world? The idea has intrigued philosophers and scholars for hundreds of years, but until recently there has not been enough clear evidence to point to any meaningful answer. Now, with contemporary research on color, shape, and spatial orientation systems, it is beginning to look as though language does indeed affect thought processes to some extent. It appears as though categories don't just reflect our world, they may actually

intervene in shaping the way we see it. Categories don't just exist in the world independently of people. Rather, categories are the result of how we interact with the world (G. Lakoff 1987, 51).

Categories and Metaphors

Compare again Hopi and English ways of talking about time. In Hopi you talk about time by remembering it and repeating it; a successful rain ceremony recalls previous successful ceremonies and previous rains, expressing the wish to repeat this success in the present or future. Time is thought of in cycles of repetition, and units of time are seen as repetitions of the cycle (on the first day, on the second day, and so forth). In English you talk about time as if it is "a ribbon or scroll marked off into equal blank spaces, suggesting that each be filled with an entry" (Whorf 1941/1956b, 153).

The Hopi grammatical system allows and perhaps even encourages you to perceive time in cycles. Although words for observable things (cat, dog, house) can be expressed as either singular or plural, words for nonobservable things (hour, day, month) can be expressed only in the singular. You cannot say "two days;" you have to say "one day and another day." You cannot say "for the next three weeks;" you have to say "this week and the next week and the next week after that." You cannot say "four months from now;" you have to say "in the fourth month from now." This kind of grammatical system supports metaphors suggesting persistence and continuity. A metaphor like "life is a journey" probably provides an important frame for Hopi speakers to talk about how they experience life, and by extension, time. Expressions like "prepare for a journey," "embark on a journey," or "arrive at a stopping place" all draw from this metaphor.

In contrast, English grammar allows words for nonobservable things (hour, month, day) to be both singular and plural, just as with nouns for observable things (cat, dog, house). English speakers can speak of one day or two days, one week or three weeks, one month or four months. This makes time measurable as well as objectifiable, and it makes it possible for us to demand wages based on the amount of time that we have worked and to make daily entries into logs and calendars and diaries. This kind of grammatical system supports metaphors suggesting measurability and countability. A metaphor like "time is money" probably provides an important frame for English speakers to talk about how they experience time, and by extension, life. "Wasting time," "spending time," "not having enough time," "running out of time," and so on are expressions that draw from this metaphor. As Whorf put it, the English expression "Well begun is half done" would make sense in the Hopi scheme of things.

Metaphors and Frames: Framing Metaphors, Framing Debates

Frames trump facts. GEORGE LAKOFF

According to cognitive linguists, the words we use create—and are used within—frames. The idea of *frames* is similar to the idea of *worldview*. We view the world through frames. Frames often invoke cultural metaphors, grouping ideas into commonly used phrases. When we talk about the "Founding Fathers" of our country, for example, we are building and reinforcing a metaphorical frame through which we view our country as a family. (Note, by the way, that we rarely talk about *founding mothers*; we will have more to say about this in Chapter 10.) The idea of country as family is reinforced by other phrases that we use such as *sending our sons to war* or *daughters of the American Revolution*. Frames help us to talk about things. It is easier to talk or think about something that your language already has a frame for. If you have a frame for something, you probably also have lots of words and phrases that fit comfortably into that frame.

It is more difficult to talk about, and perhaps even to think about, something that you have no frame for in your language. Cognitive scientists call this *hypocognition*, or lack of the ideas that you need for talking or thinking about something. The idea of *hypocognition* is based on the work of anthropologist Robert Levy (1924–2003), who suggested a connection between the high rates of suicide in Tahiti and the lack of a concept of grief or any words to talk about grief. People experienced grief, but their language did not provide them with the frames for thinking and talking about it or with the words they needed for expressing grief (Levy 1973; G. Lakoff 2004, 24).

Frames impose other kinds of restrictions on how we experience the world around us. In defining a worldview, a frame can make it difficult for you to absorb and think about facts or experiences that do not fit into that frame. People who are confronted with ideas that do not fit into one of their frames generally find ways to dismiss those ideas or to interpret them in ways that fit into their frames. Ideas that contradict established frames just don't seem believable or thinkable. As George Lakoff puts it, "Frames trump facts" (2004, 115).

Frames affect how we think about and interact with the world around us (see Cross-Language Miscommunication 2.2: Race, Place, and the Power of Frames). Does it make a difference if we talk about taxes as a burden or as community maintenance fees? Each phrase invokes a different kind of frame and a different kind of response. If taxes are a burden, then *tax relief* is a welcome salve. If taxes are community maintenance fees, then *paying taxes* is a patriotic act, helping to build community resources, such as roads and streetlights, or to support community schools. Does it make a difference if we talk about gay marriage

Cross-Language Miscommunication 2.2

RACE, PLACE, AND THE POWER OF FRAMES

Cousin Joe, a New Orleans blues singer whose autobiography I edited, had a story that he liked to tell to nightclub audiences. The story evoked the days of rampant segregation in the South, when African Americans experienced significant levels of discrimination. It also evoked the old stereotype of the racist Southern policeman; you know, the one that you still sometimes see in old movies. Well, according to the story, Joe was driving in a small town in Mississippi when he happened to run a red light. Almost immediately he was stopped by one of those stereotypical old policemen and informed in no uncertain terms that he had violated the law and would be going to jail. Joe, however, countered with an alternative frame for the event. "Officer," he said, "I know I ran that red light back there, but when I tell you why I did it I'm sure you're going to let me go free." "Go, on," replied the officer. "Well, sir," said Joe, "I know I'm in Mississippi, and when I saw all the White folks go on the green light I just figured the red light was for us Black folks!" As the story goes, the officer was so amused by Joe's frame-shift that he laughed and let Joe go. Now, the story may or may not be true, but it made for a great performance piece, and it enabled Joe to deliver a poignant message to his audiences. Above all, I have always remembered it as an outstanding example of the powerful way that frames can operate to define situations and to define our responses to those situations.

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or about same-sex marriage? About pro-life or pro-choice decisions? To the extent that each of these phrases invokes different frames, different cultural metaphors, or different worldviews, the words we use make a very big difference.

A good example of how different words can evoke different frames comes from two photographs that were circulated in news media and on the web after Hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans in 2005. One photograph, showing an African American man wading through the water, had the caption "A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store." The other photograph, showing a European American couple wading through water, had the caption "Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store." Although the photographs were almost identically



(a) A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it made landfall on Monday.

AP/Dave Martin



(b) Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana.

AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen

FIGURE 2.5 Different words, different frames: looting and finding

composed (see Figure 2.5), the words "looting" and "finding" in the captions evoked very different frames, and the outcry from concerned individuals was immediate.

SUMMARY

What does all this mean? Do people who speak different languages really see the world differently or do they just talk about it differently? Is ethnosemantics "God's truth"? Or is it "hocus pocus," as some critics have suggested (Burling 1964)? Certainly, ethnosemantics provides an important and useful technique for learning another language and culture through its system of categorizations. Certainly, members of different cultures and speakers of different languages divide and talk about the world in terms of what is most important to them. Perhaps their view of the world is also influenced by the languages that they have learned to speak.

Linguistic relativity is a fairly well accepted concept by now. Most people accept the idea that learning another language is not just learning new labels for the same things. Instead, it is all about learning a different

set of cultural assumptions and about what things are considered worth labeling in that culture. It means learning something of the world that that language makes sense of. It also is about learning the complex and intriguing systems by which the items labeled are classified and organized and related to one another. Learning another language takes you into the less easily charted territory of learning a new set of grammatical principles: new tenses, new ways to think about time and the physical world, new ways to organize words into sentences, and new idioms and expressions. Finally, learning a new language gives you a unique opportunity to reflect on and to gain new insight into your own language and world, and to recognize the similarities and differences between the two (or more) languages and cultures that you now have access to.

Linguistic determinism, on the other hand, has been a controversial issue for as long as it has been around. It is controversial because it is still unclear, after years of theorizing and experimenting, whether language really does organize the world for us or whether it just expresses how our culture has taught us to organize the world. It is also challenging because those of us who have lived and worked in more than one language are sure that there is *something* going on but have difficulty articulating it clearly enough that it can be identified, tested, and proved (or disproved). In fact, it is quite probable that language both organizes the world *and* expresses a culture's organization of the world. This complex interrelationship between language and culture makes the subject of primary importance to anthropologists.

KEY TERMS

categorization system
cognitive anthropology
componential analysis
contrast analysis
cultural emphasis
deictic
ethnography
ethnoscience
ethnoscience model
ethnosemantics
feature analysis
frames
linguistic determinism
linguistic relativity
mental map
new ethnography
principle of linguistic relativity

prototype theory
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
semantic domain
Strong Whorf
taxonomy
Weaker Whorf
Whorfian hypothesis
Whorf-Sapir hypothesis

FURTHER READING

About Language and Culture

Gentner, Dedre, and Susan Goldin-Meadow, eds. 2003. *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. This is a collection of essays on how language may or may not influence culture.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. This is an intriguing study of another way that language affects culture.

Some Classic Examples of the New Ethnography

Agar, Michael H. 1986. *Independents declared: The dilemmas of independent trucking*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. This ethnography uses ethnographic semantics to explore the world of independent truckers.

Spradley, James P., and Brenda J. Mann. 1975. *The cocktail waitress: Woman's work in a man's world*. New York: McGraw Hill. This ethnography uses ethnographic semantics to explore the world of cocktail waitresses—one of the first of its kind.

About Whorf and Linguistic Relativity

Gumperz, John J., and Stephen C. Levinson, eds. 1996. *Rethinking linguistic relativity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. This book examines new evidence for linguistic relativity and explores its impact on contemporary thinking about the subject. Introductions to each section make this book highly accessible for students.

Lucy, John. 1992b. *Language, diversity, and cognitive development: A reformulation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. This overview presents linguistic relativity from Boas, through Sapir and Whorf, and beyond.

Maroski, L. E. 2006. *The one that is both*. New York: iUniverse. This engaging novel explores the implications of the Whorfian view of language.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1941/1956. *Language, thought and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Ed. J. B. Carroll. New York: MIT Press. Whorf's style is quite readable for beginners, even though a bit dated.

About Universals in Color Terms

Berlin, Brent, and Paul Kay. 1969. *Basic color terms: Their universality and evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press. This is the original study on universality in color terms.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Readings

The workbook/reader for this book has readings that can help you to further explore and understand the issues introduced in this chapter.

Exercises

Exercises in the workbook/reader will assist you in understanding the issues introduced in this chapter and in further exploring the complex relationship between language and culture.

Selected exercises in the workbook/reader will help you to explore the relationship between language and culture in specific languages, to try your hand at ethnosemantic research, and to compare words for colors in various languages.

Web Exercises

The companion website for this book has a series of links designed to help you explore the interrelationship between language and culture in greater depth. The companion website also contains study questions that will help you review important concepts.

Guided Projects

If you are creating a new language, you will need to develop a cultural emphasis for your language. If you are working with a conversation partner, your instructor may ask you to explore similarities and differences in the ways that language categorizes experience in your two languages. Your instructor will be your guide.

The Sounds of Language

In the Field, Comoro Islands, October 1967



"You mustn't to say the *r*," said Nounou, patiently.

He was correcting, yet again, my miserable attempts to produce a sound that seemed—at least to me—to be somewhere between the *t* of *train* and the *ch* of *chain*. Try as I might, I couldn't locate the proper place for my tongue. Nor could I find exactly the right mechanism for pushing the air over my tongue to get the right sound.

Nounou was a Lycée (high school) student who was learning English. He was helping us with our Shinzwani for a few hours each week, and we were helping him with his English. We had already taught him that *enough* was pronounced [enuf] and not [enugu].

Today we were working on sounds that were difficult for each of us. We had shown him how to hear and pronounce the *th* in *thanks* so that he could differentiate English words like *both* and *boat*. Now he was trying to get us to hear and pronounce *tr*, so that we could differentiate Shinzwani words like *ntru* 'hermit crab' and *ntu* 'arrow' or *hutrona* 'to put on makeup' and *hutona* 'to skin an animal'.

It was important to learn this new *tr* sound; otherwise, we could easily end up talking about putting makeup on goats. But there was nothing like *tr* in English, and both of us—my anthropologist husband and I—kept inserting an *r* in our attempts to say *tr*.

"You mustn't to say the *r*," Nounou repeated. And I wondered if I would ever get this right. Just trying hundreds of times was going to be slow and would test the limits of Nounou's (and my) patience.

I decided to get technical and to draw on my linguistic anthropology training.

"Where are you putting your tongue?" I asked.

"Here," he said, sticking his finger into his mouth and pointing upward.

"Can I look?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, setting his tongue in place and opening his mouth wide.