The Anthropology of Language 3rd edition
Instructor's Manual
Chapter 2 – Language and Culture

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces linguistic relativity and explores the complex interrelationships between language and culture. It explores the ideas that linguistic differences might create differences in worldview and that different cultural perspectives might create linguistic differences. It shows how ethnosemantics can provide an important and useful technique for learning another language and culture through its system of categorizations.

Linguistic relativity is a fairly well-accepted concept by now and the chapter explains the concept in detail. It shows how learning another language is not just learning new labels for the same things, that it involves learning a different set of cultural assumptions about what things are considered worth labeling in that culture. It also involves learning new 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. And it provides opportunities for comparison between languages.

Linguistic determinism, on the other hand, has been a controversial issue for as long as it has been around and the chapter explores this controversy carefully. 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). The chapter takes on this challenge and explores some of the recent research in the area. The chapter takes the position that language probably both organizes the world *and* expresses a culture's organization of the world and explains why the complex interrelationship between language and culture makes the subject of primary importance to anthropologists.

Lecture Notes

Personal experiences in crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries are useful here as will experience with framing and metaphors in your own daily life. Students will probably also have stories of differences in linguistic and cultural emphasis as well as in framing and metaphor use that they have observed or encountered personally. Personal narratives can also help with discussing linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity. If you have multilingual students in the class they may be able to introspect sufficiently to discuss whether they "think" differently when they are speaking different languages. It might even be possible to compare metaphors and frames across languages if your class is sufficiently multilingual.

Reading Notes

Harold C. Conklin: Hanunóo Color Categories.
I have chosen Conklin's article for this chapter of the workbook because it correlates well with the material discussed in the text. It provides a readable discussion of how color

naming systems may or may not be related to color perception and recognition, and it is a nice example of the uses of ethnosemantics as a field technique. Conklin shows how ethnosemantic analysis can help to clarify the understanding of underlying structures, both in language and in culture, and shows how the Hanunoo color naming system reflects the Hanunóo cultural emphasis on plants.

It is helpful to refer the students to a standard color chart as they read this article. Nick Hale's color chart is the one most used by linguistic anthropologists working with color terminology. Students can be asked to write a short summary of the article, focusing on how Conklin uses ethnosemantics to analyze the Hanunóo color naming system. They can also be asked to compare their own color naming systems with the Hanunoo system that Conklin describes.

Exercise Notes

The ethnosemantics exercise (L2.1) is a fun project for students to do. A brief in-class demonstration of ethnosemantic analysis, especially taxonomy building and feature analysis, can be very helpful in getting students started on this project. Choose a domain and plunge in, asking the students for "kinds of x" and "what x (and y) are kinds of." Note that if you ask the entire class to participate in building a taxonomy you will encounter differences of opinion on what terms can be included and in what locations. (One year a student jokingly suggested including "squirrels" under "parts of trees.") This provides a good opening for discussing the fact that not all members of a speech community have identical semantic domains, and for addressing the whole question of stereotyping and generalizing about languages and cultures. If you prefer to keep it simple, then choose just one person as the "target" of the exercise —you can be the target if you wish —and then have everyone else ask the questions as you guide the class through the process of building a taxonomy and developing a feature analysis.

Once you have demonstrated the process, you can pair the students off and ask them to complete a quick taxonomy and feature analysis in class. They can usually complete this in about 15 minutes; it is nice to follow this with a short discussion of the experience. An important benefit of having students interview each other is that students gain the experience of what it feels like to *be* interviewed. This experience tends to help make them more sensitive as interviewers.

The exercise also works well as an out-of-class project. Students can work in pairs as described above or they can be asked to complete the assignment with their conversation partners. I generally allow two to three weeks for completion of the assignment if I am going to use it this way.

Web Exercises

The companion web site will be the place to find the most up-to-date links for each chapter. If you have access to the internet from your teaching classroom then it is a good idea to follow one or more of the links during lecture and to discuss the points that you find most compelling. The comparative color term exercise (W2.1), for example, can be a fun project for students to do. It can be done in five or ten minutes at the beginning of a class period and then discussed immediately afterward, or it can be done as a group classroom project.

If you can project the color chart onto a screen then students will quickly discover that they do not agree on color foci for basic terms ("the reddest red," or the "greenest green," and so on). Nor do they agree on the boundaries of basic colors. If you have students in class who are fluent in more than one language they may be willing to contribute their

color terminologies to the discussion as well. The range of differences that you encounter in this exercise will help to make the discussion of linguistic relativity and determinism more meaningful to the students.

As with the ethnosemantics exercise, this one can be assigned as an out-of-class project. One good way to do this is to ask the students to complete the first step of the exercise (identifying their basic color terms, foci and boundaries) *before* coming to class; then you can have them compare their lists and charts in class. You can ask them to complete the second and third parts of the exercise outside of class (interviewing a friend, drawing and commenting on a contrastive chart) and have them hand it in during a subsequent class period for grading.

Students can also be encouraged to explore online dictionaries of other languages and to develop lists of words in specific semantic domains. The companion web site has links to a variety of online dictionaries, including Inuit, Swahili, and more. Students can be encouraged to explore similarities and differences in how languages categorize and name objects or actions, and they can write about the differences in cultural emphasis that different vocabularies might reflect.

Guided Projects

Language Creating

Give the students five or ten minutes at the end of class to think about what kind of cultural focus they might want their languages to reflect. Advise them that this can change as they begin developing actual vocabulary lists, so they are not locked in to any decisions that they have made so early in the semester. Ask them to turn in a sheet of paper giving the name of the language group and the kind of cultural focus they have selected. You can return this to them at the next class period, with feedback.

Conversation Partnering

Both the contrastive kin term analysis (CP2.2) and the comparative color term analysis (CP2.1) are good "ice-breakers" for conversation partnering, giving students something fairly non-threatening to discuss with their conversation partners as they get to know one another. Either one of these analyses can work well for beginning students, and can also help them to gain a better understanding of important basic concepts in linguistic anthropology. Some years I ask everyone to do the same analysis (kinship *or* color terms). Other years I let them choose individually whether to do a kinship analysis or a color term analysis. When grading, I look primarily for consistency between the data they present and the way they discuss that data.

Students doing the kinship analysis should be reminded that the goal is NOT to collect detailed genealogical information (which may be threatening in some cases, or culturally impolite), but rather to learn the <u>words</u> that people use for "kinds of relatives" (aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and so on). Be sure to alert students to the fact that some of their conversation partners may be uncomfortable talking about family; if this is the case, then they should do the color terminology project instead.

In addition to serving as good ice-breakers both of these projects help to provide more direct experiences with cultural and linguistic variation. Discussing these projects in class can contribute significantly to the general student understanding of differences in cultural emphasis as well as questions of cultural and linguistic relativity.

I generally allow a week (or two at most) for this project to be completed. It is best to get the projects completed during the time that you are still discussing the relevant

chapter, so that students can report on the results of their projects in class, and so that student projects don't get too far out of sync with the readings.

One good advantage to assigning one (or both) of these projects early in the semester is that it requires the students to begin meeting with their conversation partners. Encourage the students to contact you (or your teaching assistant) if they are having difficulty arranging meetings so that you can make suggestions, or adjustments. In some cases the conversation partners may not actually want to participate in the project and new partners may have to be assigned as quickly as possible. If there are going to be problems, having an assignment due early in the semester is a great way to find out about them, so that they can be resolved.

The ethnographic semantics projects (CP2.3 and CP2.4) also work well if the individuals working together as conversation partners already know one another. Remind students that they should not be pushy and demanding, or appear to be using their conversation partners for research. Advanced anthropology majors should already know that they need to be culturally sensitive in their interactions with others, but all students can benefit from a reminder. One good way to help develop some sensitivity is to pair-up the students in the class and have them do a brief ethnosemantic analysis with one another; then debrief them in class on how it felt to be the focus of such research. If you are satisfied that they understand the implications involved, then you can assign one or the other of the ethnosemantic analysis exercises. Otherwise, just use the kinship and color units.

Further Reading

For students who are interested in reading further, here is a selection of books and articles chosen for their readability, as well as for their timeliness and relevance.

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 Institute 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.