Chapter 5

Language and Communication

What Is Language?

- A system for the communication, in symbols, of any kind of information.
- Through language, people share their experiences, concerns, and beliefs and communicate these to the next generation.
- A system of communication using sounds or gestures that are put together in meaningful ways according to a set of rules.
- A signal is a sound or gesture that has a natural or self-evident meaning.

How Is Language Related to Culture?

- Without our capacity for complex language, human culture as we know it could not exist.
- Age, gender, and economic status may influence how people use language.
- People communicate what is meaningful to them, and that is largely defined by their culture.
Language and Learning

- Humans can communicate past and future
- Language is related to culture and learning
- Language and children

How Do Languages Change?

- Languages are constantly transforming—new words are adopted or coined, others are dropped, and some shift in meaning.
- Languages change for various reasons:
  - Selective borrowing by one language from another
  - The need for new vocabulary to deal with technological innovations or altered social realities.

The Nature of Language

- There are approximately 6,000 languages.
- Most anthropologists deal with 5% of the languages in the world.
- All languages are organized in the same basic way.
- Spoken languages use sounds and rules for putting the sounds together.
- Sign languages use gestures rather than sounds.
Properties of Language

- Multimedia
- Discrete
- Arbitrary
- Productive
- Displacement
- The most difficult language to learn depends upon your native language

Linguistics

- The study of all aspects of language:
  - Phonetics
  - Phonology
  - Morphology
  - Syntax
  - Grammar

Linguists and Fieldwork

- For linguists studying language in the field, laptops and recording devices are indispensable tools.
- Here Tiffany Kershner of Kansas State University works with native Sukwa speakers in northern Malawi, Africa.
Phonology

- The study of language sounds.
- *Phonetics* is the study of the production, transmission, and reception of speech sounds.
- In linguistics, *phonemes* are the smallest classes of sound that make a difference in meaning.

Descriptive Linguistics

- The branch of linguistics that involves unraveling a language by recording, describing, and analyzing all of its features.

Historical Linguistics

- Historical linguistics deals with the fact that languages change.
- Specialists in this field investigate relationships between earlier and later forms of the same language, study older languages for developments in modern ones, and examine interrelationships among older languages.
Historical Linguistics

- **Language family**
  - A group of languages descended from a single ancestral language.

- **Linguistic divergence**
  - The development of different languages from a single ancestral language.

Structural Linguistics

- Phonology and morphology used to figure out languages
- Phonemes – sounds
- Morphemes – units of meaning
- English has 46 phonemes

Morphology

- The study of the patterns or rules of word formation in a language (including such things as rules concerning verb tense, pluralization, and compound words).
- In linguistics, *morphemes* are the smallest units of sound that carry a meaning.
Syntax and Grammar

- **Syntax**
  - In linguistics, the rules or principles of phrase and sentence making.

- **Grammar**
  - The entire formal structure of a language consisting of all observations about the morphemes and syntax.

Studying a Language

1. Isolate the phonemes, or the smallest classes of sound that make a difference in meaning.
2. Determine all groups or combinations of sounds that seem to have meaning.
3. See how morphemes are put together to form phrases or sentences.

Biology and Human Speech
Glottochronology

In linguistics, a method for identifying the approximate time that languages branched off from a common ancestor. It is based on analyzing core vocabularies.

Core vocabularies
- In language, pronouns, lower numerals, and names for body parts and natural objects.
Digital Divide

80% of today’s Internet users are native speakers of just ten of the world’s 6,500 languages.

Linguistic Nationalism

The attempt by ethnic minorities, and even countries to proclaim independence by purging their languages of foreign terms.

Sociolinguistics

The study of the relationship between language and society, examines how social categories (such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and class) influence the use and significance of distinctive styles of speech.

Gendered speech is distinct male and female syntax exhibited in various languages around the world.
Gendered Speech

Makers of the film Dances with Wolves hired a language coach to teach Lakota to the actors who did not know how to speak it. The lessons did not include the “gendered speech” aspect of Lakota. When Lakota speakers saw the finished film, they were amused to hear the actors who portrayed Lakota warriors speaking like women.

Dialects

Varying forms of a language that reflect particular regions or social classes and that are similar enough to be mutually intelligible.

Code Switching

The process of changing from one language or dialect to another.
Ethnolinguistics

- The study of the relation between language and culture.
- Linguistic relativity is the proposition that diverse interpretations of reality embodied in languages yield demonstrable influences on thought.

Linguistic Determinism

- The idea that language to some extent shapes the way in which we view and think about the world around us.
- Sometimes called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis after its originators Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- A language is not simply an encoding process but is rather a shaping force.
- Language guides thinking and behavior by predisposing people to see the world in a certain way.
- There has been a recent renewal of interest in this hypothesis.
Linguistic Determinism and the Aymara Indians

Aymara Indians living in the highlands of Bolivia and Peru in South America depend on the potato as their major source of food. Their language has over 200 words for this vegetable, reflecting the many varieties they grow and the different ways they preserve and prepare it.

Gesture-Call System

Inherited from our primate ancestors.

Gesture component consists of body motions used to convey messages.

Call component consists of extralinguistic noises involving various voice qualities and vocalizations.

Gestures

Facial expressions and bodily postures and motions that convey intended and subconscious messages.

Kinesics

A system of notating and analyzing postures, facial expressions, and body motions that convey messages.

Proxemics

The cross-cultural study of humankind’s perception and use of space.
Learned Gestures

The “Hook ‘em, horns” salute flashed by U.S. President Bush and his family during his 2005 inauguration shocked many Europeans who interpreted it as a salute to Satan.

Visual Counterpoint

Cultures around the world have different attitudes concerning personal space. How does the gap between the suited U.S. businessmen pictured here compare with that of the robed men of Saudi Arabia?

Paralanguage

The extralinguistic noises that accompany language, for example, those of crying or laughing.
Tonal language

- A language in which the sound pitch of a spoken word is an essential part of its pronunciation and meaning.

Apes and Sign Language

- Several species of apes have been taught to use American Sign Language.
- Some chimpanzees have acquired signing vocabularies surpassing 400 words, and a lowland gorilla named Koko has a working vocabulary of more than 1,000 words.

Origin of Language: One Theory

- Early hominids, began using gestures to communicate intentions within a social setting.
- When *Homo erectus* moved out of the tropics, they needed to plan and communicate to survive seasons of cold temperatures.
- By the time archaic *Homo sapiens* appeared, finely controlled movements of the mouth and throat had given rise to spoken language.
Language and Symbols

Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row, Mohawk chief of the Iroquois Confederacy, holding a wampum belt of hemp string and shell beads.
Wampum designs were used to symbolize a variety of important messages or agreements, including treaties with other nations. (By Dutch painter Johannes Verelst in 1716. National Archives of Canada collections.)

Writing System

A set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way.
An alphabet is a series of symbols representing the sounds of a language arranged in a traditional order.