



# Language and Culture

# Language

- ▶ **Mean of communication**
- ▶ **Primary vehicle of communication**
- **Through language**
- ▶ **We establish & maintain the relationship**
- ▶ **We transmit our culture**
- ▶ **We categories the world**
- ▶ **We Interpret & organize the reality**

# Cont

- ▶ **Language separates us from other species of animals**
- ▶ **This single human trait makes us unique from animals.**
- ▶ **We cannot be human without a language**

# Three main function of language

- ▶ **Cultural perspective: it is primary means of preserving the culture and medium of transmitting the culture of the new generations.**
- ▶ **It helps establish and preserve community by linking individuals into communities of shared identity.**
- ▶ **Societal level: it is important to all aspect of human interaction because it often related to the political goals.**

# Culture

- ▶ **Characteristics shared by community**
- ▶ **Distinguish by other communities**
- ▶ **Learn by other people**
- ▶ **Different communities have some common or different characteristics**
- ▶ **In culture we mostly include eminent characteristics that exist rare in others**

# Relationship between language and culture

- ▶ **Structure of language determines the way the language that a speaker of that language view the language of world.**
- ▶ **Culture is reflected in language cultural requirement do not determine structure of language but influence how it used.**

# Sapir Whorf Hypothesis

- ▶ Two American linguists  
Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf.



# The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

## **Sapir (1929)**

**Human beings do not live in the society alone. Language of the society predispose certain choices of interpretation about how we view the world.**

## **Whorf (1930s)**

**We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. We categorise objects in the scheme laid by the language and if we do not subscribe to these classification we cannot talk or communicate.**

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**The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis consists of two associated principles:**

- 1. Linguistic Determinism**
- 2. Linguistic Relativity**

**Linguistic Determinism: Language may determine our thinking patterns, the way we view and think about the world. Linguistic Determinism is also called «strong determinism»**

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- ▶ One well-known example Whorf used to support his theory was the number of words the Eskimo Language has for 'snow for example 'apun' snow on the ground 'qanikca' hard snow on the ground ' etc.
- ▶ Arabic has many words for different kinds of camels, in Chinese there is only one term luotuo and in English there is camel



**Linguistic Relativity: the less similar the languages more diverse their conceptualization of the world; different languages view the world differently.**

# Cont'd

## 2. Linguistic relativity

- ▶ Speakers of different languages perceive the world differently
- ▶ Language influence thinking
- ▶ Linguistic difference between cultures are associated with cultural difference in thinking
- ▶ View points vary from language to language.

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- ▶ **The structure doesn't determine the view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language towards adopting a particular world view**
  - ▶ **Different languages represent different ways of thinking about the world around us.**

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- ▶ **The Whorfian perspective is that translation between one language and another is at the very least, problematic, and sometimes impossible.**
  - ▶ **. One such example is of the Punjabi word “joot.”**

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- ▶ **There is closest relationship between language and thought. Language may not determine the way we think but it does influence the way we perceive and remember and it affects the ease with which we perform mental task.**

# Effect of culture on language

- ▶ **Culture influences language acquisition from the very early stage through the entire developmental process.**
- ▶ **Culture influences all aspects of language.**
- ▶ **It is through use of language the an individual is transformed into agent of culture.**



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- ▶ **Culture has a powerful influence on verbal and nonverbal encoding and decoding processes.**
- ▶ **Culture affects not only language lexicons, but also the function and/or pragmatics.**
- ▶ **Change in society may produce corresponding linguistic changes**

# Language differences across cultures

- ▶ **Culture and Lexicons**

- ▶ **Self-Other Referents**

- ▶ **In U.S., the use of “I”, “we”, is prevalent, but in Japan there are cultural rules governing how to refer self and other. It is dependent largely on the status relationship between you and the other person.**

- ▶ **This reflects importance of status and group differentiation in Japan.**

# High vs. Low Context Cultures

- ▶ **This has to do with the extent to which the specific contents of messages are spelled out.**
- ▶ **In Low Context Cultures, everything is made crystal clear; no need to read between the lines. “What part of ‘NO’ don’t you understand” mode of communicating.**
- ▶ **The opposite is true for High context Cultures. If you don’t read between the lines and understand the cultural context of the words used, you won’t get the meaning of what was said.**