Anthropological Linguistics

Linguistic anthropology, the branch of anthropology that studies human languages, investigates their structure, history, and relation to social and cultural contexts. Although it shares data, theories, and methods with the more general discipline of linguistics, it differs in that it includes distinctly anthropological questions, such as, how does language influence or reflect culture? And how does language use differ among distinct members of a society?

In its early years, linguistic anthropology emphasized the documentation of languages of cultures under ethnographic study-particularly those whose future seemed precarious due to colonization, forced assimilation, population decimation, capitalist expansion, or other destructive forces. When the first Europeans began to colonize the world five centuries ago, an estimated 12,000 distinct languages existed. By the early 1900s-when anthropological research began to take off-many languages and peoples had already disappeared or were on the brink of extinction. Sadly, this trend continues, with predictions that nearly half of the world's remaining 6,000 languages will become extinct over the next hundred years (Crystal, 2002; Knight, Studdert-Kennedy, & Hurford, 2000).

Linguistic anthropology, which studies contemporary human languages as well as those of the past, is divided into four distinct branches**: historical linguistics, descriptive linguistics, ethnolinguistics, and sociolinguistics.**

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS

Historical linguistics deals with the emergence of language in general and how specific languages have diverged over time. Some of the earliest anthropological interest in language focused on the historical connections between languages. For example, nineteenth century linguists working with European languages demonstrated similarities in the sound systems between a particular language and an earlier parent language from which the language was derived. In other words, by comparing contemporary languages, linguists have been able to identify certain language families. Through techniques such as ***glottochronology***, linguists can now approximate when two related languages began to diverge from each other.

Historical linguists deal with the fact that languages change. In addition to deciphering "dead" languages that are no longer spoken, they investigate relationships between earlier and later forms of the same language, study older languages to track processes of change into modern ones, and examine interrelationships among older languages.

For example, they attempt to sort out the development of Latin (spoken almost 1,500 years ago in southern Europe) into the Romance languages of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Romanian by identifying natural shifts in the original language, as well as modifications brought on by several centuries of direct contact with Germanic-speaking invaders from northern Europe.

When focusing on long -term processes of change, historical linguists depend on written records of languages. They have achieved considerable success in working out the relationships among different languages, and these are reflected in classification schemes. For example, English is one of approximately 140 languages classified in the larger Indo -European language family**.**

A **language family** is a group of languages descended from a single ancestral language. This family is subdivided into eleven subgroups (Germanic, Romance, and so on), indicating that there has been a long period (6,000 years or so) of **linguistic divergence** from an ancient, unified language (reconstructed as Proto-Indo-European) into separate "daughter" languages. English is one of several languages in the Germanic subgroup**,** all of which are more closely related to one another than they are to the languages of any other subgroup of the Indo-European family.

Despite the differences between them, the languages of one subgroup share certain features when compared to those of another. As an illustration, the word for "father" in the Germanic languages always starts with an *f* for closely related *v* sound (Dutch *vader,* German *Vater,* Gothic *Fadar).*

Among the Romance languages, by contrast, the comparable word always starts with a *p:* French *pere,* Spanish and Italian *padre-all* derived from the Latin *pater.* The original Indo -European word for "father" was *p'ter,* so in this case, the Romance languages have retained the earlier pronunciation, whereas the Germanic languages have diverged.

Historical linguists are not limited to the faraway past, for even modern languages are constantly transforming adding new words, dropping others, or changing meaning. Studying them in their specific cultural context can help us understand the pro cesses of change that may have led to linguistic divergence in the past.

DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS

Descriptive linguistics is the study of sound systems, grammatical systems, and the meanings attached to words in specific languages. Every culture has a distinctive language with its own logical structure and set of rules for putting words and sounds together for the purpose of communicating. In its simplest form, the task of the descriptive linguist is to compile dictionaries and grammar books for previously unwritten languages.

Descriptive linguistics involves unravelling a language by recording, describing, and analyzing all of its features. It is a painstaking but ultimately rewarding process in that it provides deeper understanding of a language-its structure, its unique linguistic repertoire (figures of speech, word plays, and so on).

The process of unlocking the underlying rules of a spoken language requires a trained ear and a thorough understanding of the way multiple different speech sounds are produced. Without such know-how, it is extremely difficult to write out or make intelligent use of any data concerning a particular language.

Phonology

To describe and analyze any language, one needs first an inventory of all its distinctive sounds. The systematic identification and description of the distinctive sounds in a language is known as **phonetics.** Rooted in the Greek word *phone* (meaning "sou n d"), phonetics is basic to **phonology,** the study of language sounds.

Some of the sounds used in other languages may seem very much like those of researchers' own speech pattern, but others may be unfamiliar. For example, the *th* sound common in English does not exist in the German language and is difficult for most German speakers to pronounce, just as the *r* sound used in numerous languages is tough for Chinese speakers. And the unique "click" sounds used in Bushmen languages in southern Africa are difficult for speakers of just about every other language.

While collecting speech sounds, linguists work to isolate the **phonemes -the** smallest units of sound that make a difference in meaning. Linguists carry out this isolation and analysis through a process called the ***minimal-pair test***. They try to find two short words that appear to be exactly alike except for one sound, such as *bit* and *pit* in English. If the substitution of *b* for *p* in this minimal pair makes a difference in meaning, as it does in English, then those two sounds have been identified as distinct phonemes of the language and will require two different symbols to record.

If, however, linguists find two different pronunciations (as when "butter" is pronounced "budder") and then find no difference in their meaning for native speakers, the sounds represent ed will be considered variants of the same phoneme. In such cases, for economy of representation only one of the two symbols will be used to record that sound wherever it is found. As this example suggests,

linguists distinguish many more phonemes (44) in English speech than the 26 letters in the English alphabet.

Morphology, Syntax, and Grammar

While making and studying an inventory of distinctive sounds, linguists also look into **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). They do this by marking out specific sound s and sound combinations that seem to have meaning. These are called **morphemes -the** smallest units of sound that carry meaning in a language.

Morphemes are distinct from phonemes, which can alter meaning but have no meaning by themselves. For example, a linguist studying English in a Canadian farming community would soon learn that *cow* is a morpheme a meaningful combination of the phonemes c, *o,* and *w.* Pointing to two of these animals, the linguist would elicit the word *cows* from local speakers. This would reveal yet another morpheme-the s- which can be added to the original morpheme to indicate plural.

phonemes The smallest units of sound that make a difference in meaning in a language.

morphology The study of the patterns or rules of word formation in a language, including the guidelines for verb tense, pluralization, and compound words.

morphemes The smallest units of sound that carry a meaning in language. They are distinct from phonemes, which can alter meaning but have no meaning by themselves.

syntax The patterns or rules by which words are arranged into phrases and sentences.

grammar The entire formal structure of a language, including morphology and syntax.

The next step in unraveling a language is to identify its **syntax - the** patterns or rules by which morphemes, or words, are arranged into phrases and sentences. The **grammar** of the language will ultimately consist of all observations about its morphemes and syntax.

ETHNOLINGUISTICS

Cultural linguistics (also known as ***ethnolinguistics***) is the branch of anthropological linguistics that examines the relationship between language and culture. In any language, certain cultural aspects that are emphasized (such as types of snow among the Inuit, cows among the pastoral Maasai, or automobiles in U.S. culture) are reflected in the vocabulary of that language. Moreover, cultural linguists explore how different linguistic categories can affect how people categorize their experiences, how they think, and how they perceive the world around them.

In this type of research, anthropologists may investigate how a language reflects the culturally significant aspects of a people's traditional natural environment. For example, Aymara Indians living in the Bolivian highlands depend on the potato as their major source of food, and their language has over 200 words for this vegetable, reflecting the many varieties they traditionally grow and the many different ways that they preserve and prepare it.

Similarly, many people in the United States today possess a rich vocabulary allowing them to precisely distinguish between many different types of cars, categorized by model, year, and manufacturer. Another example concerns cultural categories of color: Languages have different ways of dividing and naming the range of light in the electromagnetic spectrum visible to the naked human eye. In modern English we speak of black, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, and white, as well as "invisible" colors such as ultraviolet and infrared. Other languages mark out different groupings on this continuum of hues. For instance, **Indians in Mexico's North-western mountains speaking Tarahumara have just one word for both green and blue- siyoname.**

The idea that the words and grammar of a language are directly linked to culture and affect how speakers of the language perceive and think about the world is known as **linguistic relativity.** This theoretical concept is associated with the pioneering ethnolinguistic research carried out by U.S. anthropologist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf during the 1930s. Focusing on the

interplay of language, thought, and culture, their research resulted in what is now known as the ***Sapir-Whorf hypothesis****:* the idea that each language provides particular grooves of linguistic expression that predispose speakers of that language to perceive the world in a certain way.

Whorf gained many of these insights while translating English into Hopi, a North American Indian language still spoken in Arizona. Doing this work, he discovered that Hopi differs from English not only in vocabulary but also in terms of its grammatical categories such as nouns and verbs. For instance, Hopi use numbers for counting and measuring things that have physical existence, but they do not apply numbers in the same way to abstractions like time. They would have no problem translating an English sentence such as, "I see fifteen sheep grazing on three acres of grassland;' but an equally simple sentence such as, "Three weeks ago, I enjoyed my fifteen minutes of fame" would require a much more complex translation into Hopi.

It is also of note that Hopi verbs express tenses differently than English verbs. Rather than marking past, present, and future, with *-ed, -ing,* or *will,* Hopi requires additional words to indicate if an event is completed, is still ongoing, or is expected to take place.

This shows that the Hopi language structures thinking and behaviour with a focus on the present-on getting ready and carrying out what needs to be done right now. Based on his research on the Hopi language and culture, Whorf developed his import ant theoretical in sight "that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment.

The picture of the universe shift s from tongue to tongue" (Carroll, 1956, p. vi). If language does mirror cultural reality, it would follow that changes in a culture will sooner or later be reflected in changes in the language. We see this happening all around the world today (Wolff & Holmes, 2011).

Both Sapir and Whorf were suggesting that language is more than a vehicle for communication; it actually establishes mental categories that predispose people to see things in a certain way. For example, if my language has a single word—*aunt*—that refers to my mother's sister, my father's sister, my mother's brother's wife, and my father's brother's wife, it is likely that I will perceive all of these family members as genealogically equivalent and consequently will behave toward them in essentially the same way. Thus, Sapir and Whorf suggested that both perception and the resulting behaviour are determined by the linguistic categories we use to group some things under one heading and other things under another heading.

One very creative test of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis was made by **Joseph Casagrande** (1960), using a matched sample of Navajo-speaking children. Half of the sample, who spoke only Navajo, were matched on all significant sociocultural variables (such as religion, parental education, family income) with the other half, who spoke both Navajo and English. **Because the groups were identical on all important variables except language, it would be logical to conclude that whatever perceptual differences emerged between the two groups could be attributed to language.**

Having a thorough knowledge of the Navajo language, Casagrande understood that Navajo people, when speaking about an object, are required to choose among a number of different verb forms depending on the shape of the object. **When asking a Navajo speaker to hand you an object, you use one verb form if the object is long and rigid like a stick and another verb form if it is long and flexible like a rope. Based on this linguistic feature, Casagrande hypothesized that children who spoke only Navajo would be more likely to discriminate according to shape than the English-speaking children.** English-speaking children would be more likely to discriminate according to other features such as size or color.

This hypothesis was tested by having both groups of children participate in a number of tasks. The children were shown two objects (a yellow stick and a blue rope) and then asked to tell which of these two objects was most like a third object (a yellow rope). In other words, both groups of children were asked to categorize the yellow rope according to likeness with either the yellow stick or the blue rope.

Casagrande found that the children who spoke only Navajo had a significantly greater tendency to categorize according to shape (yellow rope and blue rope) than the bilingual children, who were more likely to categorize according to color.

According to their hypothesis, languages establish in our minds categories that force us to distinguish between the things we consider different and the things we consider similar. For example, if Spaniards and Japanese are shown instantaneously projected images of bull fighters and sumo wrestlers, the Spaniards are likely to identify only the images of bull fighting while the Japanese will see only the images of sumo wrestling. The explanation of this phenomenon is that perception is selective. Because we are constantly being bombarded with far more stimuli than we can effectively process, our brains filter out the less familiar pieces of information so that we can concentrate on the more familiar. And, of course, what is familiar to any given person will be based on his or her learned experiences occurring within a cultural context.

The power of language can also be seen in the in the way people use language to alter other people's perceptions of various things. For example, language can be used to mislead by making things appear better than they actually are. Large organizations, such as corporations and branches of the federal government, are particularly adept at using euphemisms—forms of language used to conceal something unpleasant, bad, or inadequate. **Companies no longer *fire* employees; rather, employees are *outplaced*, *released*, *dehired*, or *nonrenewed*. Corporate structures are *downsized*, *reengineered*, or *restructured*.** Terms like ***reducing redundancy* and *enhancing efficiency*** are designed to conceal the fact that the company is having problems. Military organizations use such euphemisms as *tactical redeployment* to refer to a retreat of troops, *pre-emptive strike* to disguise the fact that they attacked first, and *regime change* to gloss over the fact that a country's sovereignty has been violated.

This type of language, designed to alter our perception of what is real, is called ***doublespeak*** by linguist William Lutz: Doublespeak, such as that which calls cab drivers ***urban transportation specialists***, elevator operators' *members of the vertical transportation corps*, and automobile mechanics *automotive internists*, can be considered humorous and relatively harmless. However, doublespeak that calls a fire in a nuclear reactor building *rapid oxidation*, an explosion in a nuclear power plant an *energetic disassembly*, the illegal overthrow of a legitimate administration *destabilizing a government*, and lies *inoperative statements* is language that attempts to avoid responsibility, that attempts to make the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, something unpleasant appear attractive, and that which seems to communicate but does not.

Drawbacks to the Hypothesis The problem with the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis—and the reason it remains a hypothesis rather than a widely accepted fact—is causation. Sapir and Whorf were linguistic determinists who posited that language *determines* culture. In fact, Sapir suggested that people are virtual prisoners of their language when he stated that "human beings . . . are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society" (1929: 209). Others have suggested that language simply reflects, rather than determines, culture. To be certain, language and culture influence each other in important ways. Yet problems arise when attempting to demonstrate that language determines culture, or vice versa, in any definitive way. What does seem obvious, however, is that all people, being constantly bombarded with sensory stimuli, have developed filtering systems to bring order to all of these incoming sensations.

Sapir, Whorf, and more recent scholars have suggested that one such filtering system is language, which provides a set of lenses that highlight some perceptions and de-emphasize others. Today most scholars agree that language does influence perception in certain limited ways. We cannot conclude from this, however, that language forces or coerces people to have particular thoughts or perceptions, or prevents them from thinking in certain ways.

Whatever may be the precise effect of language on culture, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis has served to focus attention on this important relationship.

SOCIOLINGUISTICS

The fourth branch of anthropological linguistics, known as ***sociolinguistics***, examines the relationship between language and social relations. For example, sociolinguists are interested in investigating how social class influences the particular dialect a person speaks. They also study the situational use of language—that is, how people use different forms of a language depending on the social situation they find themselves in at any given time. To illustrate, the words and grammatical structures a U.S. college student would choose when conversing with a roommate are significantly different from the linguistic style used when talking to a grandparent or a potential employer during a job interview.

historical linguistics The branch of anthropological linguistics that studies how languages emerge and change over time.
glottochronology The historical linguistic technique of determining the approximate date that two languages diverged by analyzing similarities and differences in their vocabularies.
descriptive linguistics The branch of anthropological linguistics that studies how languages are structured.
ethnolinguistics The branch of anthropological linguistics that studies the relationship between language and culture.
sociolinguistics The branch of anthropological linguistics that studies how language is used in different social contexts.

Anthropological linguists also engage in applied activities. After describing the structure of a language, descriptive linguists frequently take the next logical step and work with educators to plan effective strategies for teaching English as a second language. Some anthropological linguists serve as consultants to government and educational leaders responsible for setting language policy in a state or country. Anthropological linguists sometimes work with local (small-scale) minority groups whose languages are spoken by so few people that they are in danger of becoming extinct. Still other applied linguists help design foreign language and culture programs for people who are preparing to live and work abroad.

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.

Language and Gender

As a major factor in personal and social identity, gender is often reflected in language use, so it is not surprising that numerous thought-provoking sociolinguistic topics fall under the category of language and gender. These include research on **gendered speech - distinct** male and female speech patterns, which vary across social and cultural settings. One of the first in-depth studies in this genre explored the relationship of gender and power to explain why North American women exhibit less decisive speech styles than men. A subsequent wave of related scholarly works have produced new insights about language as a social speech "performance" in both private and public settings (Lakoff, 2004).

Social Dialects

Sociolinguists are also interested in **dialects -varying** forms of a language that reflect particular regions, occupations, or social classes and that are similar enough to be mutually intelligible. Distinguishing dialects from languages and revealing the relationship between power and language, the famous U.S. linguist Noam Chomsky often quoted the saying that a dialect is a language without an army.

Such is the case in China, the world's most populous country with almost 1.4 bill ion inhabitants, almost all of whom speak Chinese. In fact, there are many Chinese languages, each consist ing of many regional dialects.

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

gendered speech Distinct male and female speech patterns that vary across social and cultural settings.

dialects The varying forms of a language that reflect particular regions, occupations, or social classes and that are similar enough to be mutually intelligible.

Migrants from the northern parts of the country, where numerous dialects of Mandarin Chinese are traditionally spoken, understand almost nothing of Chinese languages spoken in the eastern and western regions. For this reason, almost all Chinese nationals to day learn Standard Chinese, the country's official language, historically developed as a lingua franca based on a Mandarin dialect traditionally spoken in the country's capital city, Beijing.

Linguistic boundaries are not only geographic or territorial, but may also indicate or reflect social class, economic status, political rank, or ethnic identity.

In many societies where different dialects are spoken, individuals often become skilled at switching back and forth between them, depending on the situation in which they are speaking. Without being conscious of it, we all do the same sort of thing when we switch from formality to informality in our speech, depending on where we are and to whom we are talking. The process of changing from one mode of speech to another as the situation demands, whether from one language to another or from one dialect of a language to another, is known as code switching.

THE ORIGINS OF LANGUAGE

Cultures all around the world have sacred stories or myths addressing the age-old que stion of the origins of human language. Anthropologists collecting these stories have often found that cultural groups tend to locate the place of origin in their own ancestral homelands and believe that the first humans also spoke their language.

Early scientific efforts to explain the origin of language suffered from a lack of solid data. Today, there is more scientific evidence, including genetic information, to work with - better knowledge of primate brains, new studies of primate communication, more information on the development of linguistic competence in children, more human fossils that can be used to tentatively reconstruct what ancient brains and vocal tracts were like, and a better understanding of the lifeways of early human ancestors. We still cannot conclusively prove how, when, and where human language first developed, but we can now theorize reasonably on the basis of more and better information.

The archaeological fossil and genetic records suggest that the archaic humans known as Neandertals (living from about 30,000 to 125,000 years ago in Europe and southwestern Asia) had the neurological and anatomical features necessary for speech. Recently discovered Denisova hominin’s genetic analysis suggests that these archaic humans ranging in Asia were close enough to Neandertals-their western "cousins" at the time - that they, too, shared that capacity.

Because human language is embedded within a gesture-call system of a type that we share with nonhuman primates (especially great apes), anthropologists have gained considerable insight into human language by observing the communication systems of fellow primates (Roberts, Roberts, & Vick, 2014). **Like humans, apes are capable of referring to events removed in time and space, a phenomenon known as *displacement* and one of the distinctive features of human language (Fouts & Waters, 2001; Lyn et al., 2014).**

Numerous attempts have been made to teach chimpanzees to speak

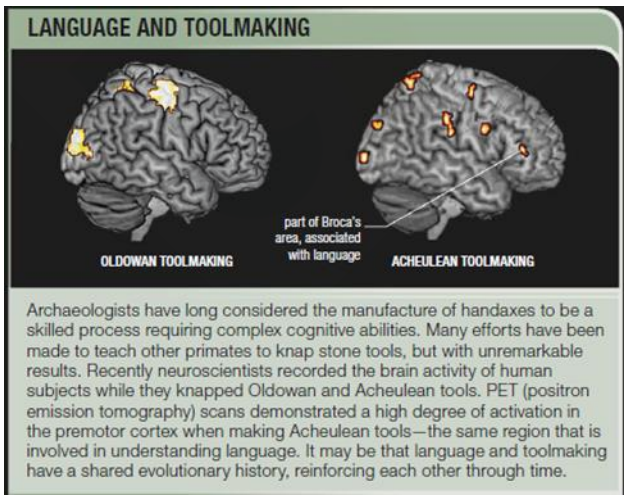
Because there is continuity between gestural and spoken language, the latter could have emerged from the former through increasing emphasis on finely controlled movements of the mouth and throat. This scenario is consistent with the appearance of neurological structures underlying language in the earliest representatives of the genus *Homo* and steady enlargement of the human brain that began as early as 2.5 million years ago. The soft tissues of the vocal tract related to speech are not pre served in the fossil record. But as outlined in the Biocultural Connection in this chapter, a comparison of the vocal anatomy of chimps and humans allows paleoanthropologists to identify the anatomical differences responsible for human speech that appeared over the course of human evolution.

There are obvious advantages to spoken over gestural language for a species increasingly dependent on tool use for survival. To talk with your hands, you must stop whatever else you are doing with them; speech does not interfere with that. Other benefits include being able to talk in the dark, past opaque objects, or among speakers whose visual attention is diverted. Although we do not know precisely when the changeover to spoken language took place, all would agree that spoken languages are at least as old as the species Homo sapiens.

THEORIES OF ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

In Charles Darwin's vision of the origins of language, early humans had already developed musical ability prior to language and were using it "to charm each other." We do know that the ability to produce sound and simple vocal patterning (a hum versus a grunt, for example) appears to be in an ancient part of the brain that we share with all vertebrates, including fish, frogs, birds and other mammals. But that isn't human language. We suspect that some type of spoken language must have developed between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago, well before written language (about 5,000 years ago). Yet, among the traces of earlier periods of life on earth, we never find any direct evidence or artifacts relating to the speech of our distant ancestors that might tell us how language was back in the early stages.

The tool-making source theory:



In the physical adaptation view, one function (producing speech sounds) must have been superimposed on existing anatomical features (teeth, lips) previously used for other purposes (chewing, sucking). A similar development is believed to have taken place with human hands and some believe that manual gestures may have been a precursor of language. By about two million years ago, there is evidence that humans had developed preferential right-handedness and had become capable of making stone tools. Wood tools and composite tools eventually followed. Toolmaking, or the outcome of manipulating objects and changing them using both hands, is evidence of a brain at work.

According to Pilbeam the abundance of tools, smaller teeth and also controlled use of fire by the erectus revealed that they cooked food and tool making and group living acted as selective forces. These favoured the development of memory sites in Occipital lobe, thinking sites in frontal lobe and different motor areas in cerebral cortex in the brain enabling the erectus population with symbolic behaviour.

The genetic source theory

We can think of the human baby in its first few years as a living example of some of these physical changes taking place. At birth, the baby's brain is only a quarter of its eventual weight, and the larynx is much higher in the throat, allowing babies, like chimpanzees, to breathe and drink at the same time. In a relatively short period of time, the larynx descends, the brain develops, the child assumes an upright posture and starts walking and talking This almost automatic set of developments and the complexity of the young child's language have led some scholars to look for something more powerful than small physical adaptations of the species over time as the source of language. Even children who are born deaf (and do not develop speech) become fluent sign language users, given appropriate circumstances, very early in life. **This seems to indicate that human offspring are born with a special capacity for language. It is innate, no other creature seems to have it, and it isn't tied to a specific variety of language.** Is it possible that this language capacity is genetically hard-wired in the newborn human?

As a solution to the puzzle of the origins of language, this innateness hypothesis would seem to point to something in human genetics, possibly a crucial mutation, as the source. This would not have been a gradual change, but something that happened rather quickly. We are not sure when this proposed genetic change might have taken place or how it might relate to the physical adaptations described earlier. However, as we consider this hypothesis, we find our speculations about the origins of language moving away from fossil evidence or the physical source of basic human sounds toward analogies with how computers work (e.g. being pre-programmed or hardwired) and concepts taken from the study of genetics. The investigation of the origins of language then turns into a search for the special "language gene" that only humans possess.

A mutated gene known as FOXP2 helps explain why humans speak and chimps don't (Paulson 2005). The key role of FOXP2 in speech came to light in a study of a British family, identified only as KE, half of whose members had an inherited, severe deficit in speech (Trivedi 2001). The same variant form of FOXP2 that is found in chimpanzees causes this disorder. Those who have the nonspeech version of the gene cannot make the fi ne tongue and lip movements necessary for clear speech, and their speech is unintelligible—even to other members of the KE family (Trivedi 2001). Chimps have the same (genetic) sequence as the KE family members with the speech defi cit. Comparing chimp and human genomes, it appears that the speech- friendly form of FOXP2 took hold in humans around 150,000 years ago. This mutation conferred selective advantages (linguistic and cultural abilities) that allowed those who had it to spread at the expense of those who did not (Paulson 2005). Language offered a tremendous adaptive advantage to Homo sapiens. Language permits the information stored by a human society to exceed by far that of any nonhuman group. Language is a uniquely effective vehicle for learning. Because we can speak of things we have never experienced, we can anticipate responses before we encounter the stimuli. Adaptation can occur more rapidly in Homo than in the other primates because our adaptive means are more flexible.

The Biology of Human Speech

Although other primates have shown some capacity for language (a socially agreed-upon code of communication), actual speech is unique to humans; this ability is linked to humans' distinct anatomical development of the vocal organs.

Of key importance are the positions of the human larynx (voice box) and the epiglottis. The larynx, situated in the respiratory tract between the pharynx (throat) and trachea (windpipe), contains the vocal cords. The epiglottis is the structure that separates the esophagus, or food pipe, from the windpipe as food passes from the mouth to the stomach. (See the figure for comparative diagrams of the anatomy of this region in apes and humans.)

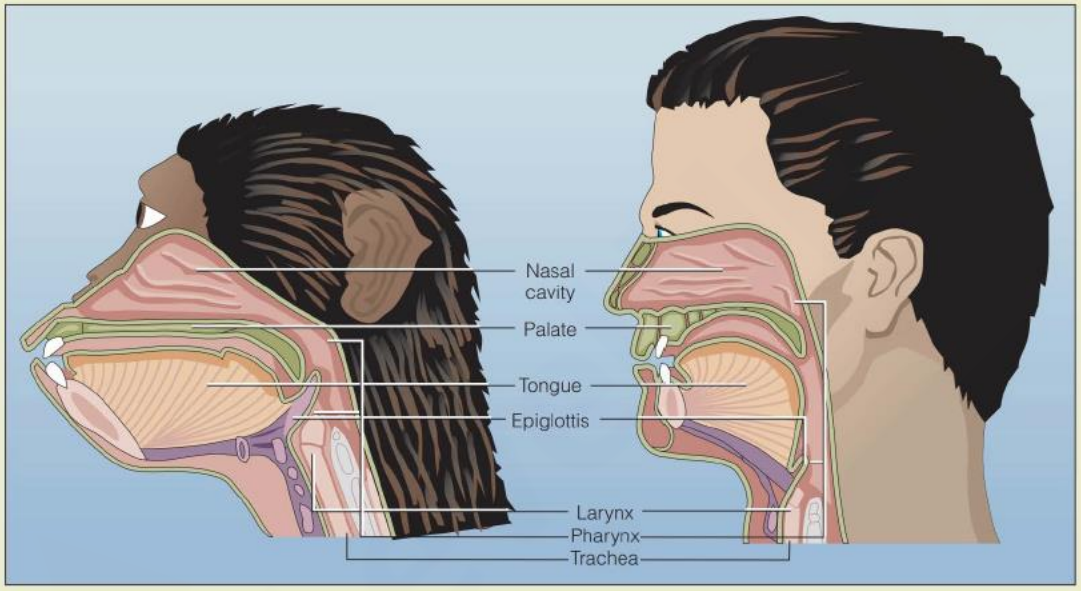
As humans mature and develop the neurological and muscular coordination for speech, the larynx and epiglottis shift to a downward position. The human tongue bends at the back of the throat and is attached to the pharynx, the region of the throat where the food tract and airway share a common path. Sound occurs as air exhaled from the lungs passes over the vocal cords and causes them to vibrate.

Through continuous interactive movements of the tongue, pharynx, lips, and teeth, as well as nasal passages, the sounds are alternately modified to produce speech—the uniquely patterned sounds of a particular language. Based on long-standing socially learned patterns of speech, different languages stress certain distinctive types of sounds as significant and ignore others. For instance, languages belonging to the Iroquoian family, such as Mohawk, Seneca, and Cherokee, are among the few in the world that have no bilabial stops (*b* and *p* sounds). They also lack the labiodental spirants (*f* and *v* sounds), leaving the bilabial nasal *m* sound as the only consonant requiring lip articulation.

It takes many years of practice for people to master the muscular movements needed to produce the precise sounds of any particular language. But no human can produce the finely controlled speech sounds without a lowered position of the larynx and epiglottis.

Biocultural Questions

Sharing a capacity for speech, humans say and understand many thousands of words. Because macaws and other parrots also learn many words, do they have speech? And if so, do they actually think?



A comparison of human and ape vocal organs.

The natural sound source theory

A quite different view of the beginnings of language is based on the concept of natural sounds. The human auditory system is already functioning before birth (at around seven months). That early processing capacity develops into an ability to identify sounds in the environment, allowing humans to make a connection between a sound and the thing producing that sound. This leads to the idea that primitive words derive from imitations of the natural sounds that early men and women heard around them. Among several nicknames that he invented to talk about the origins of speech, Jespersen (1922) called this idea the "bow-wow" theory. The "bow-wow" theory In this scenario, when different objects flew by, making a Caw-Caw or Coo-Coo sound, the early human tried to imitate the sounds and then used them to refer to those objects even when they weren't present.

Jespersen identified five theoretical frameworks that had been used in the past to explain language origins. He designated them as follows:

i) The Bow-Wow Theory

According to this theory, language began when our ancestors started imitating the natural sounds around them. The first speech was onomatopoeic—marked by echoic words such as moo, meow,

splash, cuckoo, and bang. **H**umans imitated animal sounds that became increasingly more and more complex to accommodate our communication needs.

What's wrong with this theory?

Relatively few words are onomatopoeic, and these words vary from one language to another. For instance, a dog's bark is heard as au au in Brazil, ham ham in Albania, and wang, wang in China. In addition, many onomatopoeic words are of recent origin, and not all are derived from natural sounds.

ii) The Ding-Dong Theory

This theory, favoured by Plato and Pythagoras, maintains that speech arose in response to the essential qualities of objects in the environment. The original sounds people made were supposedly in harmony with the world around them.

What's wrong with this theory?

Apart from some rare instances of sound symbolism, there is no persuasive evidence, in any language, of an innate connection between sound and meaning.

iii) The La-La Theory

The Danish linguist Otto Jespersen suggested that language may have developed from sounds associated with love, play, and (especially) song

What's wrong with this theory?

As David Crystal notes in "How Language Works" (Penguin, 2005), this theory still fails to account for "... the gap between the emotional and the rational aspects of speech expression... ."

iv) The Pooh-Pooh Theory

This theory holds that speech began with interjections—spontaneous cries of pain ("Ouch!"), surprise ("Oh!"), and other emotions ("Yabba dabba do!"). Language started as emotional responses to things like pain, pleasure, and surprise.

What's wrong with this theory?

No language contains very many interjections, and, Crystal points out, "the clicks, intakes of breath, and other noises which are used in this way bear little relationship to the vowels and consonants found in phonology."

v) The Yo-He-Ho Theory

According to this theory, language evolved from the grunts, groans, and snorts evoked by heavy physical labor.

What's wrong with this theory?

Though this notion may account for some of the rhythmic features of the language, it doesn't go very far in explaining where words come from.

As Peter Farb says in "Word Play: What Happens When People Talk" (Vintage, 1993): "All these speculations have serious flaws, and none can withstand the close scrutiny of present knowledge about the structure of language and about the evolution of our species."

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

The various means by which humans send and receive messages without using words (for example, gestures, facial expressions, and touching).

To comprehend fully how people in any particular culture communicate, we must become familiar with their nonverbal forms of communication in addition to their language. Nonverbal communication is important because it helps us to interpret linguistic messages and often carries messages of its own. In fact, it has been suggested that up to 70 percent of all messages sent and received by humans are nonverbal.

Like language, nonverbal forms of communication are learned and therefore vary from one culture to another. Even though some nonverbal cues have the same meaning in different cultures, an enormous range of variation in nonverbal communication exists among cultures. In some cases, a certain message can be sent in a number of different ways by different cultures. **For example, whereas in the United States we signify affirmation by nodding, the very same message is sent by throwing the head back in Ethiopia, by sharply thrusting the head forward among the Semang of Malaya, and by raising the eyebrows among the Dyaks of Borneo.**

Humans communicate without words in a number of important ways, including hand gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, touching, space usage, scents, gait, and stance. A thorough discussion of these and other aspects of nonverbal communication, based on the recent literature, is beyond the scope of this textbook.

A brief examination of three of the more salient types of nonverbal communication—**hand gestures, posture, and touching**—will help convey the importance of this form of human communication.

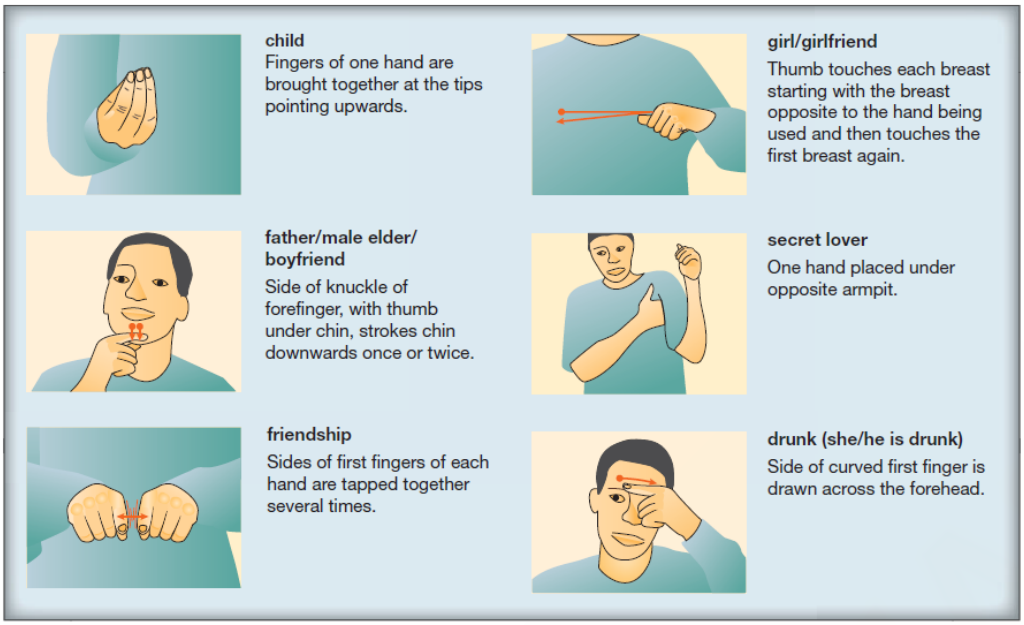
Hand Gestures

***Gestures* are movements, usually of the hands, that convey meanings. Greetings, an important part of communication in every** known culture, often involve gestures (Duranti 1997b). They are typically among the first communicative routines that children learn, as do tourists and anyone trying to learn a foreign language. Greetings establish a social encounter.

They usually involve both verbal and nonverbal language. Depending on the context and the social relationship, many variations exist for both the verbal and the nonverbal component. Contextual factors include the degree of formality or informality. Social factors include gender, ethnicity, class, and age.

Consider how many hand gestures we use every day. We cup our hand behind the ear as a nonverbal way of communicating that we cannot hear. We thumb our noses at those we don't like. We can thumb a ride on the side of the highway. We can wave hello or good-bye. We tell people to be quiet by holding our forefinger vertically against our lips. We give the peace sign by holding up our forefinger and middle finger.

Or, by making a circle with our thumb and forefinger we can communicate that everything is A-OK. However, problems arise with these gestures when we cross national boundaries. Although the A-OK sign carries a positive, upbeat message in North America, it refers to money in Japan, zero (worthless) in France, male homosexuality in Malta, and obscenity in parts of South America. Thus, a single hand gesture carries with it many different meanings throughout the world. There are also many examples of the opposite phenomenon— namely, the use of different gestures to send the same message. For example, the nonverbal ways of communicating admiration for an attractive woman vary widely throughout the world. The Frenchman kisses his fingertips, the Italian twists an imaginary moustache, and the Brazilian curls one hand in front of another as if he is looking through an imaginary telescope.



Some South African Gestures Used by a Man.

Silence

Silence is another form of nonverbal communication. Its use is often related to social status, but in unpredictable ways. In rural Siberia, an in-marrying daughter-in-law has the lowest status in the household, and she rarely speaks (Humphrey 1978). In other contexts, silence is associated with power. For example, in U.S. courts lawyers speak more than anyone else and the judge speaks rarely but has more power than a lawyer, while the silent jury holds the most power (Lakoff 1990).

The Western Apache use silence in four contexts:

- When meeting a stranger, especially at fairs, rodeos, or other public events. Speaking with a stranger immediately indicates interest in something such as money, work, or transportation, all possibly serving as reasons for exhibiting bad manners.
- In the early stages of courting. Sitting in silence and holding hands for several hours is appropriate. Speaking "too soon" would indicate sexual willingness or interest.
- When a parent and child meet after the child has been away at boarding school. They should be silent for about 15 minutes. It may be two or three days before sustained conversations are initiated.
- When "getting cussed out," especially at drinking parties. An underlying similarity of all these contexts is the uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability of the social relationships involved.

Posture (Body Stance)

The way that people hold their bodies often communicates information about their **social status, religious practices, feelings of submissiveness, desires to maintain social distance, and sexual intentions**—to mention several areas. When communicating, people tend to orient their bodies toward others by assuming a certain stance or posture.

A person can stand over another person, kneel, or "turn a cold shoulder," and in each case the body posture communicates something different. The meaning attached to different body postures varies from one culture to another and is learned in the same way that other aspects of a culture are internalized. To illustrate this point, we can look at differences in body posture that people assume when relaxing.

People in the United States, for example, are sitters, whereas people in some rural parts of Mexico are squatters. This basic **cultural difference has actually been used by the U.S. Border Patrol to identify illegal immigrants.** According to Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (1991), while flying surveillance planes at low altitudes over migrant worker camps in southern California, the border patrol can tell which groups of campers are squatting and which are sitting, the implication being that the squatters are the illegal aliens.

Perhaps one of the most visible and dramatic nonverbal messages sent by posture is submissiveness. Generally, submissiveness is conveyed by making oneself appear smaller by lowering the body (crouching, cowering, or groveling). As part of their religious practices, some Christians kneel, Catholics genuflect, and Muslims kowtow, an extreme form of body lowering in which the forehead is brought to the ground. Nowhere is bowing more important to the process of communication today than in Japanese society. Bowing initiates interaction between two Japanese, it enhances and embellishes many parts of the ensuing conversation, and it is used to signal the end of a conversation. As an indication of how pervasive bowing is in contemporary Japan, some Japanese department stores employ people whose sole function is to bow to customers as they enter the store. In fact, bowing is so ingrained in the Japanese psyche that some Japanese actually bow to invisible partners at the other end of a telephone line.

Clothing, hairstyles, and modification

Clothing, hairstyles, and modification of or marks on the body convey messages about age, gender, sexual interest or availability, profession, wealth, and emotions. The color of one's clothing can send messages about a person's identity, class, gender, and more. In the United States, gender differentiation begins in the hospital nursery with the color coding of blue for boys and pink for girls. In parts of the Middle East, public dress is black for women and white for men.

Covering or not covering various parts of the body with clothing is another culturally coded matter. Consider the different meanings of women's head or face covering in Egypt and Kuwait (MacLeod 1992). Kuwaiti women's head covering distinguishes them as relatively wealthy, leisured, and honorable, as opposed to the immigrant women workers from Asia, who do not cover their heads. In contrast, head covering in Egypt is done mainly by women from the lower and middle economic levels. For them, it is a way to accommodate conservative Islamic values while preserving their right to work outside the home. In Egypt, the head covering says, "I am a good Muslim and a good wife or daughter," while in Kuwait, the headscarf says, "I am a wealthy Kuwaiti citizen." In many conservative Muslim contexts, it is important for a woman in public to cover more than her head by wearing a full-length loose garment. These rules, along with other patriarchal values, make it difficult for women in some Muslim contexts to participate in sports while in school and in public sporting events such as the international Olympics.

In Japan, the kimono provides an elaborate coding system signalling gender and life-cycle stage (Dalby 2001). The higher one's status, the shorter is the sleeve of one's kimono. Men's kimono sleeves come in one length: short. An unmarried woman's kimono sleeves reach almost to the ground, whereas a married woman's sleeves are nearly as short as that of a man's.

Touching (Haptics)

Touching is perhaps the most personal and intimate form of nonverbal communication. Humans communicate through touch in a variety of ways or for a variety of purposes, including patting a person on the head or back, slapping, kissing, punching, stroking, embracing, tickling, shaking hands, and laying-on of hands. Every culture has a well-defined set of meanings connected with touching; that is, each culture defines who can touch whom, on what parts of the body, and under what circumstances. Some cultures have been described as high-touch cultures and others as low-touch. Some studies (Montagu 1972; Sheflen 1972; Mehrabian 1981) have suggested that eastern European, Jewish, and

Arab cultures tend to be high-touch cultures, whereas northern European cultures such as German and Scandinavian cultures tend to be low-touch.

The difference between high- and low-touch cultures can be observed in public places, such as subways or elevators. For example, Londoners (from a low-touch culture) traveling in a crowded subway are likely to assume a rigid posture, studiously avoid eye contact, and refuse to even acknowledge the presence of other passengers. The French (from a high-touch culture), on the other hand, have no difficulty leaning and pressing against one another in a crowded Parisian subway. It is surprising that there can be such significant differences in touching behavior between the English and the French, two groups separated by only a narrow channel of water.

If we need a reminder that touching is a form of human communication, we need only to read the international press over the past several years to see how some celebrities and world figures have gotten themselves into hot water because of kissing someone in public. In April 2007 screen actor Richard Geer, a Buddhist, caused a firestorm of protest when he kissed Indian actress Shilpa Shetty several times on the neck when they appeared together at a televised charity event in Mumbai. Since such public displays of affection, with unambiguous sexual overtones, are taboo in contemporary India, Geer's figure was burned in effigy in cities across India. A month earlier Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the religiously conservative president of Iran, was accused of indecency for publicly embracing and kissing the gloved hand of his former schoolteacher. Such an act is contrary to Shariah (Islamic) law and is sometimes punishable by death. In the cases of both Geer and Ahmadinejad, kissing a woman in public (a very intimate form of touching) is definitely a form of communication because it makes an explicit statement. Unfortunately, in both cases the meanings of the messages *sent* were different from the meanings *received*.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE:

For the cultural anthropologist, the study of language is important not only for the practical purpose of communicating while doing fieldwork but also because a close relationship exists between language and culture.

How Culture Influences Language

As a general rule, the vocabulary found in any language tends to emphasize the words that are considered to be adaptively important in that culture. This concept, known as cultural emphasis, is reflected in the size and specialization of vocabulary.

In standard American English, a large number of words refer to technological gadgetry (such as tractor, microchip, and intake valve) and occupational specialties (such as teacher, plumber, CPA, and pediatrician) for the simple reason that technology and occupation are points of cultural emphasis in our culture. Thus, the English language helps North Americans adapt effectively to their culture by providing a vocabulary well suited for that culture. Other cultures have other areas of emphasis.

The Nuer

A particularly good example of how culture influences language through the elaboration of vocabularies is provided by the Nuer, a pastoral people of the Sudan, whose daily preoccupation with cattle is reflected in their language **(Evans-Pritchard 1940).** The Nuer have a large vocabulary to describe and identify their cattle according to certain physical features such as color, markings, and horn configuration. The Nuer have ten major color terms for describing cattle: white (bor), black (car), brown (lual), chestnut (dol), tawny (yan), mouse-gray (lou), bay (thiang), sandygray (lith), blue and strawberry roan (yil), and chocolate (gwir). When these color possibilities are merged with the many possible marking patterns, there are several hundred combinations. And when these several hundred possibilities are combined with terminology based on horn configuration, there are potentially hundreds of ways of describing cattle with considerable precision in the Nuer language.

U.S. Example of Cultural Emphasis

In small-scale cultures such as the Nuer, where most people's lives revolve around herding, areas of cultural emphasis are fairly obvious. In middle-class American culture, which tends to be more complex occupationally, it is not always easy to identify a single area of cultural emphasis. Nevertheless, sports is one area of U.S. culture that can be shared by people from a wide variety of occupational or class backgrounds. As **Nancy Hickerson** (1980: 118) pointed out, many colloquialisms in American English are taken from the game of baseball, our national pastime:

■ He made a grandstand play.

■ She threw me a curve.

■ She fielded my questions well.

■ You're way off base.

■ You're batting a thousand (five hundred, zero) so far.

Language Mirrors Values

In addition to reflecting its worldview, a language reveals a culture's basic value structure. For example, the extent to which a culture values the individual, as compared to the group, is often reflected in its linguistic style. The value placed on the individual is deeply rooted in the North American psyche. Most North Americans start from the cultural assumption that the individual is supreme and not only can, but should, shape his or her own destiny. That individualism is highly valued in the United States and Canada as seen throughout their cultures, from the love of the automobile as the preferred mode of transportation to a judicial system that goes as far as any in the world to protect the individual rights of the accused. Even when dealing with children, North Americans try to provide them with a bedroom of their own, respect their individual right to privacy, and attempt to instill in them a sense of self-reliance and independence by encouraging them to solve their own problems.

Because of the close connection between language and culture, values (such as individualism in mainstream North America) are reflected in Standard American English. One such indicator of how our language reflects individualism is the number of words found in any American English dictionary that are compounded with the word self. To illustrate, one is likely to find in any standard English dictionary no fewer than 150 such words, including self-absorbed, self-appointed, self-centered, and self-confidence.

Outside of the U.S. mainstream, however, the assertion of self through the frequent use of *I* is considered boorish, insensitive, self-promoting, impertinent, and even hostile. In group-oriented cultures such as Japanese, people strive for the good of the larger group—such as the family or the community. Rather than stressing the pursuit of individual happiness, the Japanese are more concerned with justice (for group members) and righteousness (of group members).

How Language Influences Culture

Edward Sapir stated this notion in its most explicit form:

The real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (1929: 214)

The Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis

Drawing on Sapir's original formulation, Benjamin Lee Whorf, a student of Sapir, conducted ethnolinguistic research among the Hopi Indians to determine whether different linguistic structures produced different ways of viewing the world. Whorf's observations convinced him that linguistic structure was in fact the causal variable for different views of the world. This notion has come to be known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis.

Testing the Hypothesis Since Sapir and Whorf's original formulation, other ethnolinguists have attempted to test the hypothesis. One very creative test of the

Sapir–Whorf hypothesis was made by **Joseph Casagrande** (1960), using a matched sample of Navajo-speaking children. Half of the sample, who spoke only Navajo, were matched on all significant sociocultural variables (such as religion, parental education, family income) with the other half, who spoke both Navajo and English.

Because the groups were identical on all important variables except language, it would be logical to conclude that whatever perceptual differences emerged between the two groups could be attributed to language.

Having a thorough knowledge of the Navajo language, Casagrande understood that Navajo people, when speaking about an object, are required to choose among a number of different verb forms depending on the shape of the object. When asking a Navajo speaker to hand you an object, you use one verb form if the object is long and rigid like a stick and another verb form if it is long and flexible like a rope. Based on this linguistic feature, Casagrande hypothesized that children who spoke only Navajo would be more likely to discriminate according to shape than the English-speaking children. English-speaking children would be more likely to discriminate according to other features such as size or color.

The power of language can also be seen in the way people use language to alter other people's perceptions of various things. For example, language can be used to mislead by making things appear better than they actually are. Large organizations, such as corporations and branches of the federal government, are particularly adept at using euphemisms—forms of language used to conceal something unpleasant, bad, or inadequate. Companies no longer *fire* employees; rather, employees are *outplaced*, *released*, *dehired*, or *nonrenewed*. Corporate structures are *downsized*, *reengineered*, or *restructured*.

This type of language, designed to alter our perception of what is real, is called ***doublespeak*** by linguist William Lutz.

Drawbacks to the Hypothesis

The problem with the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**—and the reason it remains a hypothesis rather than a widely accepted fact—is causation. Sapir and Whorf were linguistic determinists who posited that language determines culture. In fact Sapir suggested that people are virtual prisoners of their language when he stated that "human beings . . . are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society" (1929: 209).

Others have suggested that language simply reflects, rather than determines, culture. To be certain, language and culture influence each other in important ways. Yet problems arise when attempting to demonstrate that language determines culture, or vice versa, in any definitive way. What does seem obvious, however, is that all people, being constantly bombarded with sensory stimuli, have developed filtering systems to bring order to all of these incoming sensations.

Sapir, Whorf, and more recent scholars have suggested that one such filtering system is language, which provides a set of lenses that highlight some perceptions and de-emphasize others.

Conclusion

Today most scholars agree that language does influence perception in certain limited ways. We cannot conclude from this, however, that language forces or coerces people to have particular thoughts or perceptions, or prevents them from thinking in certain ways. Whatever may be the precise effect of language on culture, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis has served to focus attention on this important relationship.

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES:

Language is the only tool for expressing identity and culture as well as one of the greatest emblems of human diversity. There are 7,000 living languages in the world and around 3,000 are considered as 'endangered'. This means that almost half of the planet's current linguistic diversity is under threat.

The situation in India is alarming. Some 197 languages are in various stages of endangerment in our country, more than any other country in the world. Ganesh N Devy, founder-director of the Bhasa Research and Publication Centre, Vadodara and Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh, Gujarat, said, "India may have lost 220 languages since 1961. There were 1,100 languages since 1961, based on the Census number of 1,652 mother tongues. Another 150 languages could vanish in the next 50 years."

India has more endangered languages than any other country

India	197
US	191
Brazil	190
China	144
Indonesia	143
Mexico	143
Russia	131
Australia	108
Papua New Guinea	98
Canada	87

There are five tribal languages that are moving towards extinction in India. Linguist experts say that the most threatened language is Majhi in Sikkim. According to a research conducted by People's Linguistic Survey of India, **there are just four people who currently speak Majhi** and all of them belong to the same family. Similarly, the **Mahali language in eastern India, Koro in Arunachal Pradesh, Sidi in Gujarat and Dimasa in Assam are facing extinction.**

Until recently, UNESCO has put Asur, Birhor and Korwa in its list of the world's endangered languages with **Birhor being categorised as 'Critically Endangered', with just 2,000 speakers left.**

Criteria For Declaring Endangered:

UNESCO provides a classification system in its 'Atlas of Endangered languages' as: (a) **Vulnerable** – most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home); (b) **Definitely endangered** – children no longer learn the language as a 'mother tongue' in the home; (c) **Severely endangered** – language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves; (d) **Critically endangered** – the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently; (e) **Extinct** – there are no speakers left.

According to UNESCO, any language that is **spoken by less than 10,000 people is potentially endangered.** In India, after the 1971 census, the government decided that any language spoken by less than 10,000 people need not be included in the official list of languages.

From 1971 onwards, the Census has been counting only of those languages that have more than 10,000 speakers. It resulted in a decline in the list of languages to 108 languages in the 1971 Census, as against 1,652 a decade ago.

Factors Responsible for Making Language Endangered

a) There is a link between higher levels of schooling and language loss, as regionally dominant **languages taught in class often overshadow indigenous tongues**.
b) A second factor exacerbating the threat to endangered languages is the density of roads in an area. While contact with other languages can help preserve indigenous ones, exposure to the wider world may not.
c) **Lack of employment avenues** to speaker of endangered languages
d) One of the major reasons for extinction of language is **absence of script**
e) Marginalised by English
f) **Social Stigma attached to speakers of indigenous/local languages**. They are seen as illiterate/lower class people. Hence learning new language becomes a necessity for class mobility as well as social mobility.
g) Speakers of minority languages **have suffered a long history of persecution**. Well into the 20th Century, many Native American children in Canada and the US were sent to boarding schools, where they were often forbidden to speak their native language. Today, many English-speaking Americans are still hostile towards non-English speakers, especially Spanish ones.
h) Languages usually reach the point of crisis after being **displaced by a socially, politically and economically dominant one**, as linguists put it. In this scenario, the majority speaks another language – English, Mandarin, Swahili – so speaking that language is key to accessing jobs, education and opportunities. Sometimes, especially in immigrant communities, parents will decide not to teach their children their heritage language, perceiving it as a potential hindrance to their success in life.

Consequences of Extinction of Language/Why to Preserve Languages:

Languages are conduits of human heritage. Writing is a relatively recent development in our history (written systems currently exist for only about one-third of the world's languages), so language itself is often the only way to convey a community's songs, stories and poems. The Iliad was an oral story before it was written, as was The Odyssey. "How many other traditions are out there in the world that we'll never know about because no-one recorded them before the language disappeared?"

Languages also convey unique cultures. Cherokee, for example, has no word for goodbye, only "I will see you again". Likewise, no phrase exists for "I'm sorry". On the other hand, it has special expressions all its own. One word – oo-kah-huh-sdee –represents the mouth-watering, cheek-pinching delight experienced when seeing an adorable baby or a kitten. All of these things **convey a culture, a way of interpreting human behaviour and emotion that's not conveyed the same way as in the English language**. Without the language, the culture itself might teeter, or even disappear. If we are to survive, to continue on and to exist as a people with a distinct and unique culture, then we have to have a language.

Another argument mirrors that of biodiversity conservation. Just as ecosystems provide a wealth of services for humanity – some known, others unacknowledged or yet to be discovered – languages, too, are ripe with possibility. They contain an accumulated body of knowledge, including about geography, zoology, mathematics, navigation, astronomy, pharmacology, botany, meteorology and more. In the case of Cherokee, that language was born of thousands of years spent inhabiting the southern Appalachia Mountains. Cherokee words exist for every last berry, stem, frond and toadstool in the region, and those names also convey what kind of properties that object might have – whether it's edible, poisonous or has some medicinal value. **No culture has a monopoly on human genius, and we never know where the next brilliant idea may come from. We lose ancient knowledge if we lose languages.**

Finally, languages are ways of interpreting the world, and no two are the same. As such, they can provide insight into neurology, psychology and the linguistic capacities of our species. Different languages provide distinct pathways of thought and frameworks for thinking and solving problems

> When a language dies, its speakers decide to migrate. First, they migrate to another language and then they physically start migrating to another region. The second thing that happens is that their traditional livelihood patterns go down. They may have some special skills and that disappears. Thirdly, a unique way of looking at the world disappears. Every language is a unique worldview.

Steps to be Taken:

Linguists are scrambling to document and archive the diversity of quickly disappearing languages. Their efforts include making dictionaries, recording histories and traditions, and translating oral stories.

Technology can help these efforts. Many speakers are using technology to do really interesting things that were not imaginable a generation back. For example, a version of Windows 8 is available in Cherokee, and a Cherokee app allows speakers to text in the language's 85 letters.

Another initiative is the **Rosetta Project**, a global collaboration of language specialists and native speakers working to build an open-access digital library of human languages.

We need to create livelihood support for the speakers of the language. If they have livelihood available within their language, nobody would want to switch from their language to any other language.

> The **UNESCO International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022-2032),** which begins this year, also aims to engage the global community with the critical issue of language loss.
>
> The 10-year initiative continues the work of the UN's 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages. As part of its Global Action Plan, **IDIL2022-2032, it is creating a network of international stakeholders focused on protecting the rights of indigenous people to revitalize and preserve their languages.**

The **Government of India** has initiated a **Scheme known as "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India".** Under this Scheme, the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore works on protection, preservation and documentation of all the mother tongues/languages of India spoken by less than 10,000 speakers keeping in mind the degree of endangerment and reduction in the domains of usage.