

Cross-Cultural Semantics: Part 1

How Languages Differ from One Another

How other communities means

- assert or implicate propositions
- establish truth values

How language means

How Languages Differ from One Another

Lexical differences

- cousin-brother (male cousin)
- crore (ten million)
- lakh (hundred thousand)
- Eve-teasing (harassment of women)
- godown (warehouse)
- Himalayan blunder (grave mistake)
- opticals (eyeglasses)
- nose-screw (woman's nose ornament)



India/Pakistan: mokhtari/iStock/Thinkstock

Introduction to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity

Also called the "Whorfian hypothesis" after Benjamin Lee Whorf, author of *Language, thought, and reality*

"the principle of linguistic relativity holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated."

(*Language, thought, and reality*, 214)



Benjamin Lee Whorf

Benjamin Lee Whorf in The Hartford Agent magazine, page 129. (n.d.) Benjamin Lee Whorf papers, 1898–1971 (inclusive). Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Retrieved from <http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/showthumb.aspx?q=whorf>

Introduction to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity

Also called the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” after Whorf’s teacher, Edward Sapir

“We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation...

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

(The status of linguistics as a science, 162)

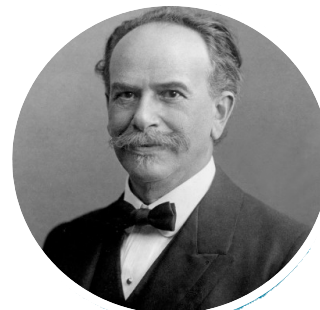


Edward Sapir

Edward Sapir (c. 1910). "Edward Sapir". Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Introduction to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity

Also called the “Boas-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” after Sapir’s teacher and sponsor, Franz Boas



Franz Boas

Franz Boas (c. 1915). "FranzBoas". Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Introduction to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity

Also called the “von-Humboldt-Boas-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis” after Wilhelm von Humboldt, who influenced Boas

“Each language sets certain limits to the spirit of those who speak it; it assumes a certain direction and, by doing so, excludes many others.”

(Humanist Without Portfolio: An Anthology of Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, 245)



Wilhelm von Humboldt

Franz Krüger (c. 1835). "Wilhelm von Humboldt". Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons;

Introduction to the Principle of Linguistic Relativity

“I find it gratuitous to assume that a Hopi who knows only the Hopi language and the cultural ideas of his own society has the same notions, often supposed to be intuitions, of time and space that we have, and that are generally assumed to be universal. In particular, he has no general notion or intuition of time as a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at an equal rate, out of a future, through a present, into a past...

In [the] Hopi view, time disappears and space is altered, so that it is no longer the homogeneous and instantaneous timeless space of our supposed intuition or of classical Newtonian mechanics.”

(Language, thought, and reality, 56, 58)



Benjamin Lee Whorf

Benjamin Lee Whorf in The Hartford Agent magazine, page 129. (n.d.) Benjamin Lee Whorf papers, 1898–1971 (inclusive). Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University, New Haven, CT. Retrieved from <http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/showthumb.aspx?q=whorf>

Functional Bases for Lexicalization

Eskimo words for “snow”

- The Dictionary of the West Greenlandic Eskimo Language
 - qanik
 - aput
- Yup'ik Eskimo Dictionary
 - 24 under “very generous” construal
 - stuff for sinking habitually into
 - blizzard
 - avalanche



Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock; Snowflake: Muyumuy/iStock/Gettyimages

Functional Bases for Lexicalization

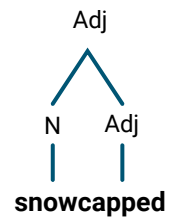
English words for “snow”

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| • snow | • sleet |
| • slush | • snowstorm |
| • powder | • flurry |
| • hardpack | • squall |
| • corn | • frost |
| • avalanche | • hoarfrost |
| • blizzard | • rime |

Functional Bases for Lexicalization

English words for “snow”

- snowflake
- snowdrift
- snowfall
- snowfort
- snowball
- snowbank
- snowcapped
- snow (= cocaine)
- snow (= tv noise)
- snow job
- snowed under
- Snow White



English Word Quiz



English Word Quiz

Write down as many words as you can think of for:



:00

Please advance to
the next slide

English Word Quiz

Write down as many words as you can think of for:



:00

Please advance to
the next slide

English Word Quiz

Write down as many words as you can think of for:



penis

:00

Please advance to
the next slide

English Word Quiz

Write down as many words as you can think of for:



shoulder



knee

:00

Please advance to
the next slide

Lexical elaboration

Lexical elaboration: Languages tend to elaborate through lexicalization those terms that are most meaningful to its speakers

breast

vagina

penis

shoulder

knee