

Cross-Cultural Semantics: Part 2

In Search of the Navajo Worldview

Navajo Kinship (partial)

?aksot:

haksot:

no^ʕyeh

ha^ʕniḥ

hakhno^ʕshe

ake:hak



Grandmothers: Kharlamova/iStock/Thinkstock

Navajo and Motion

Navajo and Motion

ʔe:h-ha:h (one moves into clothing)
(one dresses)

na-ha:h (one moves about here and there)
(one lives)

ʔani:-na-ha (one moves about newly)
(one is young)

ha-di-ʔa:h (to move words out of an enclosed space)
(sing)

Navajo and “Obligation” and “Control”

Navajo and “Obligation”

English: I must go there.

Navajo: It is only good that I go there.

Navajo and “Control”

English: I am riding the horse.

Navajo: The horse runs for me.



Horse Riding: Askold Romanov/iStock/Gettyimages

In Search of the Navajo Worldview

Navajo Worldview (Weltsicht)

What is it?

Who knows?

It's not the same as the Standard
American English (SAE) worldview

Is it compatible with the SAE worldview?

Sometimes

Navajo and English "Control"

Navajo and "Control"

✓ The horse kicked the mule.

yiztał = (sort of) kick

The horse controlled the action.

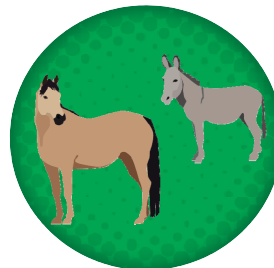
The horse struck the mule with its foot/feet.

The mule did not help bring this action about.

✓ The mule kicked the horse.

✓ The man kicked the horse.

✗ The horse kicked the man.



Farm Animals: VectorGift/Stock/Thinkstock

Navajo and English “Control”

Navajo and “Control”

✓ The horse kicked the mule.

yiztał = (sort of) kick

~~The horse controlled the action.~~

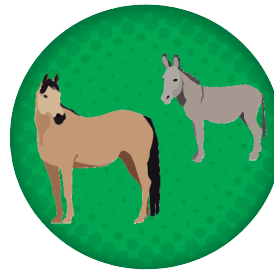
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✓ The mule kicked the horse.

✓ The man kicked the horse.

✗ The horse kicked the man.



Farm Animals: VectorGift/iStock/Thinkstock

In Search of the Navajo Worldview

| Role | Definition |
|-------------|--|
| Agent | The entity that performs the action |
| Experiencer | The entity that experiences the state |
| Instrument | The object used to perform the action |
| Patient | The entity undergoing the action; the object of the experience |
| Source | The starting point for a movement |
| Goal | The end point for a movement |
| Location | The place an action happens |

yiztał

- Mules and horses, reciprocal agency
non-human-animate ⇔ non-human-animate
- Humans and horses (and mules), unilateral agency
human => non-human-animate

Navajo and Motion

Navajo and Motion

^ʕe:h-ha:h

- One moves into clothing.
- semantic primes** • SOMEONE GO INTO CLOTHING

na-ha:h

- One moves about here and there
- semantic primes** • SOMEONE GO HERE AND THERE

^ʕani:-na-ha

- One moves about newly.
- semantic primes** • SOMEONE NEW GO

ha-di-^ʕa:h

- To move words out of an enclosed space.
- semantic primes** • TO CAUSE WORDS GO OUT FROM CONTAINER

I
YOU
SOMEONE
WANT
HEAR
NOT
CAUSE
BECOME
AND
GOOD
BAD
WORD
MALE
FEMALE
HAVE

Navajo and Causation

Navajo and Causation

English

- I am riding the horse.
- semantic primes** • I AM ON HORSE. I CAUSE HORSE GO

Navajo

- The horse runs for me.
- semantic primes** • I AM ON HORSE. HORSE CAUSE HORSE GO



Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock; Horse Riding: Askold Romanov/iStock/Gettyimages

Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity

Dani (2-colour system)
Ejagham (3-colour system)
Mu'ra-Piraha (4-colour system)
Cheyenne (5-colour system)
Candoshi (6-colour system)
English (>6-colour system)

Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock

Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity

Colour, Language, Perception

Dark and Light



2 colour terms

Colour



6+ colour terms

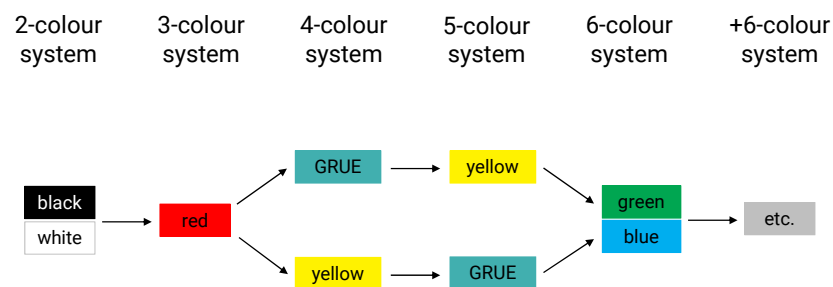
Boat docked at sunset: Elenathewise/iStock/Getty Images; Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock

Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|--------|-------|------|------|--|
| Dani (2-colour system) | black | white | | | | | | |
| Ejagham (3-colour system) | black | white | red | | | | | |
| Mu'ra-Piraha (4-colour system) | black | white | red | GRUE | | | | |
| Cheyenne (5-colour system) | black | white | red | yellow | GRUE | | | |
| Candoshi (6-colour system) | black | white | red | yellow | green | blue | | |
| English (>6-colour system) | black | white | red | yellow | green | blue | etc. | |

Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock

Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity



There is something about the world, our brains, or our eyes (or some combination thereof) that constrains lexicalization.

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Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity

"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>

Colour Terms and the Linguistic Relativity

Cross-Linguistic Calibrators

- semantic primes
- semantic roles
- event schema
- perception
- (goodwill, common-interests, ...)

Conclusion

Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis

Strong form

- language determines thought
- speakers of different languages inhabit different, mutually inaccessible realities

Translation is impossible



Weak form

- language influences thought

There are cultural misunderstandings



Strong/Weak man: November_Seventeen/iStock/Thinkstock