


05-Language



All animal species communicate in one form or another, but true language is special and unique to humans. It is a complex system of communication allowing us share details and emotions with others.

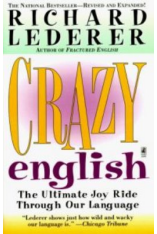
Language is a form of communication



Lost in translation







Crazy English in English speaking countries



“...a house can burn up as it burns down and in which you can fill in a form by filling it out. Why is it called after dark, when it’s really after light?”

Creating a new language

Probe

Which of the following responses best characterizes your mental state *just before* this screen appeared?

- A. On task
- B. Intentionally mind wandering
- C. Unintentionally mind wandering



Creating a new language

Still need to follow the rules of languages:

- Grammar: clear rules
 - Including syntax and morphology
- Lexicon: meaningful descriptions of the world


right

wrong

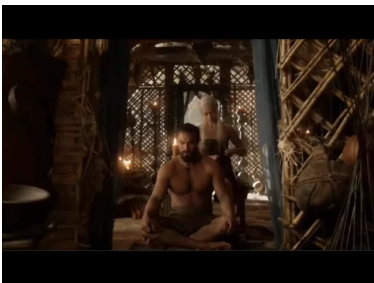


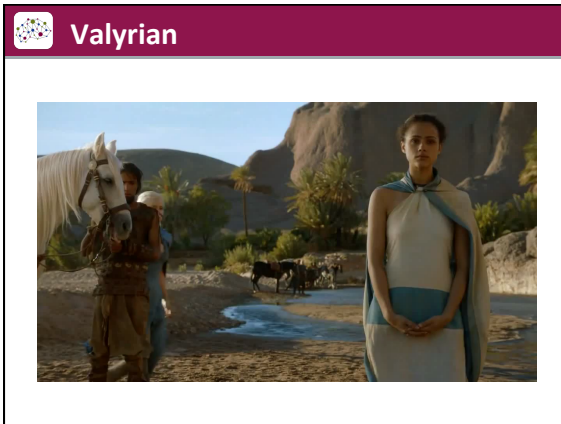
Languages differ in how their lexicon represents the world

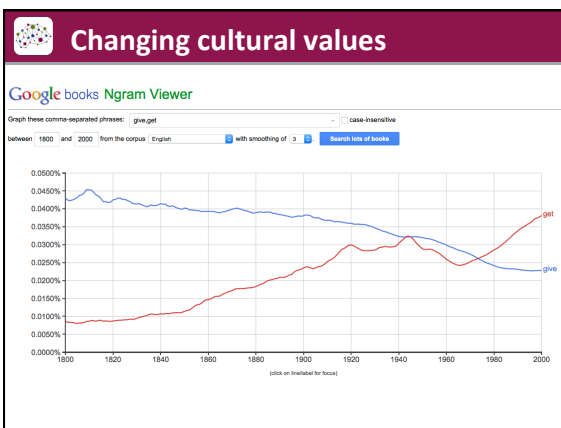




Dothroki



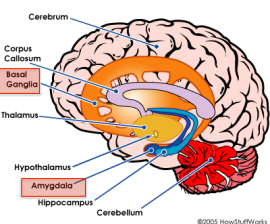




Why do people get so upset by certain words?

Why do we use certain words to make people upset?

Cognitive neuroscience of swearing




Basal Ganglia and Limbic System

Taboo words activate brain areas associated with negative emotion: Right hemisphere

Swearing as a weapon


Force a listener to think about an unpleasant (or at least emotionally charged) thought



1. What kinds of concepts trigger negative emotions?
2. Why would speakers want to trigger negative emotions in their listeners?

Content of swearing

1. The Supernatural
 - damn, hell, For Pete's sake
 - more potent in religious societies, evokes emotions of awe and fear
2. Body effluvia and organs
 - Sh*t, piss, a**hole, snot, bloody
 - effluvia are major vectors of disease
 - evokes emotions of disgust





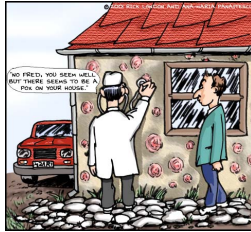
Content of swearing

3. Disease, death, and sickness

- “a pox on you”, “a plague ‘o both your houses”
 - Evokes emotions of dread

4. Sexuality

- F**k, screw, d*ck
 - But: why should thoughts about sex trigger negative emotions?
 - Exploitation, illegitimacy, incest, jealousy, cuckoldry, desertion, abuse





Why evoke negative emotions in listeners?

Dysphemistic Swearing

- Euphemism: We have to talk about this for a while for a specific purpose, but let's avoid thinking about how awful it is.
- Dysphemism: I want you to think about just how awful this is.
- Sh*t vs. Feces, f**k vs. Copulate



Emphatic swearing



- This is really, really f**king brilliant
- He thinks he's a f**king chef



Cathartic Swearing



Rage-circuit theory:

- Mammals: when suddenly injured or confined, emit sudden angry noise to startle attacker
- Humans: also triggers language system—aggressive words with negative affect



Summary: Why do we swear

Humans are prone to strong negative emotions

- Awe of supernatural, disgust of body effluvia, dread of disease, revulsion at depraved sexual acts

Nonetheless, people sometimes want to impose these thoughts on others:

- Gain their attention
- Intimidate, humiliate
- Remind them of the awfulness of the objects and activities



Conclusions

The study of how humans use words reveals:

1. All species communicate but language is special.
2. It's important to get a second opinion before getting a tattoo.
3. Developing a language is a full time job
4. Humans are guided by emotions