Your language journal is your opportunity to apply your linguistic knowledge to your everyday life. Each entry should include a 1-2 paragraph description of some observation about language (something that has happened to you or you have observed) and a 1-2 paragraph analysis of why it is linguistically interesting. Each journal entry should be no more than a page in length. You must show how the concepts you have learned in this class help you understand what is going on. In general you should not need to consult any sources other than your textbook and what you do in class, but if you do consult any sources (online or otherwise, of any type) you must cite them. Excellent journal entries (that demonstrate creative thinking and application of knowledge acquired in class to an interesting observation about language) will receive 10 points.

Why is it cool?

The words to describe cool things have changed historically in the English language. Other words that have been used to mean “cool” from the 1950s until the present are hip, boss, groovy, tubular, among others. Some of these words came into parlance but died out soon. On the other hand, the word cool has remarkably withstood the test of time. How can we explain that with our linguistic knowledge?

The sounds of the words that we make have no actual relation to the reality we see. For example, the sound k-ul has nothing to do with the state of being cool. In fact, words such as boss and groovy etc. all used to refer to the same concept but are no longer in parlance. This is more evidence for how language is arbitrary and words become cool for a little while and then die down. Sometimes previously dismissed words can reemerge. The exact socio-economic reasons for the emergence and reemergence of words are difficult to specify. What is even cooler is that what is with the word cool that has remained cool since the 1950s?

What’s good?

“What’s good?” is a commonly used greeting. “What’s good?” can also be interpreted as “What are all the good things in life [friend]?” Another interpretation of the phrase is that it asks a question and affirms the state of being of the questioner simultaneously. When I ask someone “What’s good?”, not only do I mean “What’s up?”, but at the same time reply to the other person’s question about my well-being. There’s no other phrase that I can think of that serves two very different purposes; asking a question and answering one are two fundamentally distinct parts of communication.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis holds that language can affect its speaker’s world view: “language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation”[[1]](#footnote-1) For example, the bridge example shows that speakers of a language that uses the feminine gender for the word bridge refer to it with adjectives associated with the feminine gender and vice versa. If the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is true, then asking “what’s good” to someone might not only influence how you perceive the day as good just by asking the “what’s good?”, but also how the other people perceive what days are supposed to ‘be’ like by default.

1. FROMKIN, VICTORIA. "Chapter 1 What Is Language." *INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE*. S.l.: WADSWORTH, 2018. 22. Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)