Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology

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We will be covering the following topics today:

- What is LANGUAGE?
  - Some misconceptions
  - Properties of language
- Forms of language:
  - Speech
  - Writing systems
- What does linguistics study?
- What does linguistic anthropology study?

Some misconceptions about language:

- Some languages are more complex than others.
  - This is like saying that some cultures are more sophisticated than others.
- Speakers of certain languages think better than others.
  - This is like saying that people in the capitalist world are better thinkers than hunter-gatherers.

Some general concepts about language that I agree with:

- All languages are complex.
- Language is systematic. It is rule-governed. The systematicity can be found at different levels and components.
- Universal Grammar (UG) exists. There are universal properties that all languages share. This is what linguists study.
Languages change all the time. There is nothing good or bad about this.

Languages vary systematically from person to person, area to area, and situation to situation.

People have different attitudes about different languages that are not related to languages per se, but related to the ideology associated with people who speak those languages.

Competence vs. Performance

A question: How do we get at the grammar that resides in people’s mind (the so-called mental grammar)?

Human speech is fragmented.

Speech b/w a male & female college student:

D: I am sorry that I am really neurotic right now but as soon as she said if you wanna go pee right now go and I didn’t go and now I really have to go so and she just said we’re having like extra rotations so I might have to… go in the trash can.

A: thank you for sharing that…

D: So TELL me about yourself.

A: I am five eight a hundred and forty un (cough) excuse me add twenty to that pounds
What is UG anyway?

- It is the inborn abstract grammatical system on which all real languages are based.

We will be looking at the rule-governed system in UG, including:

- Sounds  PHONOLOGY
- Words  MORPHOLOGY
- Sentences  SYNTAX
- Meaning  SEMANTICS

We will then look at how this system is used in human interaction.

- Meaning & Culture  SEMANTICS
- Language Use  PRAGMATICS
- Language & Society  SOCIOLINGUISTICS

What is Grammar?

- **Descriptive Grammar**
  - Created by linguists as a model of speakers’ linguistic competence.

- **Prescriptive Grammar**
  - It tells you how to speak or write according to someone’s idea of what is “good” or “bad.”

UG is the **Mental Grammar.**

- It is a person’s linguistic competence.
- It is inborn knowledge.
- It is how we know whether some sounds, words, and sentences are grammatical in a language or not.

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Arbitrariness in Language

- The relation b/w FORM & MEANING:
  - **Arbitrary** (symbolic)—no direct relation
    - E.g. rose → rosa → 玫瑰 (meigui)

Other examples of nonarbitrariness:

- **Onomatopoeia** (see LF p.17)
- **Sound symbolism**
  - **SMALL**: small, little, teeny, micro (English), petite (French), xiao (Mandarin), -ito (Spanish)
  - **BIG**: large, grand (English), da (Mandarin), gros, grand (French)
  - Exceptions: big
- Order of events in a sentence (LF p.20 #7)

Properties of Language (LF2.2)

- Shared with ALL other communicative systems:
  - A mode of communication
  - Semanticity
  - Pragmatic function

Other examples of nonarbitrariness:

- Some logographs in the writing system
  - In Chinese:
    - 一二三 → one two three
    - 上下 → up down
    - 日月 → sun moon
    - 水 → water
    - 人 → person

Properties of Language (LF2.2)

- Shared with SOME other communicative systems:
  - Interchangeability
  - Cultural transmission
  - Arbitrariness
  - Discreteness
Properties of Language (LF2.2)

- Particular to the linguistic system:
  - Displacement
  - Productivity (open-endedness)

Speech vs. Writing

- Among the 6900 Lgs in the world, 3000 have a writing system.
- Kinds of writing systems:
  - Logographs (Chinese)
  - Syllabic Writing (Japanese, Korean)
  - Alphabetic Writing (Indo-European Lgs)

Linguistic Anthropology

- Interdisciplinary history
  - Linguistics
  - Anthropology

- Linguistic Anthropology or Anthropological Linguistics?

Topics in Linguistic Anthropology

- Sociolinguistics—the study of language use in society
- Linguistic Relativity—the relation b/w language and thought
- Communicative Competence & Speech Community
- Focus on Performance—CA
- Language Socialization
- Language and Power
- Language and Ideology

Important Sociolinguists:

John Gumperz
- Qualitative
- Micro
- Interactional

William Labov
- Quantitative
- Macro
- Urban
What is Linguistic Anthropology? (Duranti)

- The meaning of linguistic messages should be studied within the context in which they are produced and interpreted.

- Contemporary linguistic anthropology uses a variety of analytical tools & concepts to examine the power of language in a wide range of social situations.

What is Linguistic Anthropology?

- It is the moment-by-moment construction of “texts” that is emphasized in the effort to uncover the mechanisms and resources that make the meaning of human action, words included, possible, interpretable, and consequential.
  (Duranti 2001: 32)

Tomorrow,

- Write a question or comment.
- Read LF 3.1-3.4 (Phonetics)
- Read LF 10.1 (Speech Community)
- Read Gumperz’s “The Speech Community”