Language & Communication

- Language is our primary means of communication.
  - Language is transmitted through learning, as part of enculturation.
  - Language is based on arbitrary, learned associations between words and the things they represent.
  - Only humans have the linguistic capacity to discuss the past and future in addition to the present.
- Anthropologists study language in its social and cultural context.

The function of language is to link expression to content

Expression - the actual words, phrases
Content - meanings of words, phrases
Context - social situation that words are used in

Call Systems

- Call systems consist of a limited number of sounds that are produced in response to specific stimuli (e.g. food or danger).
  - Calls cannot be combined to produce new calls.
  - Calls are reflexive in that they are automatic responses to specific stimuli.
- Although primates use call systems, their vocal tract is not suitable for speech.
Call Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUMAN LANGUAGE</th>
<th>PRIMATE CALL SYSTEMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>has the capacity to speak of things and events that are not present (Displacement)</td>
<td>are stimuli dependent, the food call will only be made in the presence of food, it cannot be “faked”</td>
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<tr>
<td>possesses the capacity to generate new expressions by combining other expressions (Productivity)</td>
<td>consist of a limited number of calls that cannot be combined to produce new calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>is group specific in that all humans possess the capacity for language, but each linguistic community has its own language</td>
<td>are species specific as there is little to no variation between communities of the same species for each call</td>
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Sign Language

- A few nonhuman primates have been able to learn to use American Sign Language (ASL).
- These nonhuman primates have displayed some “human-like” capacities with ASL.
- The experiments with ASL demonstrate that chimps and gorillas have a rudimentary capacity for language.

Nonverbal Communication

- Kinesics is the study of communication through body movements, stances, gestures and facial expressions.
- Odors also play an important role in nonverbal communication.
Levels of Organization

- **Phones**
  - perceptibly distinguishable sounds
  - can act as phonemes in any given language

- **Phonemes**
  - single structural elements of language
  - the smallest sound contrasts that distinguish meaning
  - minimal pairs: two words that differ by one sound, but are different words with different meanings; they show different phonemes

Speech Sounds

Vowel phonemes in standard American English.

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Levels of Organization

- **Morphemes**
  - smallest unit of sound that carries meaning
  - context sensitive; some sound segments are morphemes in some places and not others (dogs; snake)

- **Lexicon**
  - a dictionary containing all of the smallest units of speech that have a meaning (morphemes)

- **Syntax**
  - the rules that order words and phrases into sentences
Meaning

- **Semantics**: a language’s meaning system
- Ethnoscience, or ethnosemantics, is the study of linguistic categorization of difference, such as in classification systems, taxonomies, and specialized terminologies (such as astronomy and medicine).
- The way we divide up the world into taxonomies will reflect our experiences

Focal Vocabulary

- Specialized sets of terms and distinctions that are particularly important to certain groups
- It is argued that, while language, thought, and culture are interrelated, change is more likely to move from culture to language, rather than the reverse.

Language, Thought, and Culture

- Chomsky argues that the universal grammar is finite, and the fact that any language is translatable to any other language is taken to be evidence supporting this claim.
- The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: Sapir and Whorf are described as early advocates of the view that different languages imply different ways of thinking (e.g., Palaung vs. English, Hopi speculative tense).
Sociolinguistics

- Sociolinguistics is the study of the relation between linguistic performance and the social context of that performance.
- Sociolinguists look at what people actually say; at language in its social context.

Linguistic Diversity

- The ethnic and class diversity of nations-states is mirrored by linguistic diversity.
- Single individuals may change the way they talk depending upon the social requirements of a given setting—this is called style shifting.
- Linguistic relativity says that no language is superior to any other as a means of communication.

Gender Speech Contrasts

- In America and England, there are regular differences between men’s speech and women’s speech that cut across sub-cultural boundaries.
- The fact that women in these populations tend to speak a more “standard” dialect and use fewer “power” words is attributed to women’s lack of socioeconomic power.
Stratification & Symbolic Domination

- In situations where social stratification exists, the dialect of the dominant strata is considered “standard” and valued more than the dialects of the lower strata.
- Sociolinguistic studies have indicated that status-linked dialects affect the economic and social prospects of the people who speak them; this is called “symbolic capital”.

Black English Vernacular (BEV)

- Most linguists view BEV as a dialect of American English, with roots in southern English.
- BEV has its own complex system of linguistic rules, it is not an unstructured selection of words and phrases.
- Standard English is not superior in terms of ability to communicate ideas, but it is the prestige dialect.

Historical Linguistics

A family tree of the Indo-European languages.
Historical Linguistics

- **Divergence**: what used to be one language is now two distinct languages
- **Convergence**: two distinct languages blend to form anew language or both linguistic groups become bilingual