Cross-cultural semantics

How other communities mean
Assert or implicate propositions
Establish truth values

How Language mean

Lexical differences

Cross-cultural semantics

cousin-brother (male cousin)
crore (ten million)
lakh (hundred thousand)
Eve-teasing (harassment of women)
godown (warehouse)
Himalayan blunder (grave mistake)
opticals (eyeglasses)
nose-screw (woman's nose ornament)
scheduled caste (lowest Hindu caste)

Grammatical and stylistic differences

Cross-cultural semantics

Younger brother, I am having so many things to tell you that I am not knowing where to start. Most surprising thing about America is it is full of Americans. Everybody American, American, big and small, it is almost as if the word American is written on their heads. Everywhere Americans, Americans, big and white, it is little frightening. The flight from New Delhi to New York is arriving safely thanks to God's grace and Parents' prayers and mine too. I am not able to say or think to what extent because I am sitting in your seat as per revered grandmother's wish. Father is rightly scolding that airplane is flying too high to have good view. Still planes tell that I have done nothing.

But, brother, in next two seats are sitting two old gentle ladies and if I am getting up then they can put in lot of identification so I am not getting up for except when plane is stopping for one hour in London. Many foods are being served in carts but I am only eating cashew nuts and bread because I am not knowing what is food and what is meat. I am having a good time drinking 37 glasses of Coca-Cola.
Linguistic relativity

A.K.A. “Whorfian hypothesis”

That different languages shape different perceptions of the world.

After Benjamin Lee Whorf, author of Language, thought, and reality

Linguistic relativity

A.K.A. “Whorfian hypothesis”

That different languages shape different perceptions of the world.
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)

Linguistic relativity

A.K.A. “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”

After Whorf’s teacher, Edward Sapir

"We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation."

The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached."

(The status of linguistics as a science, 162)
Linguistic relativity

Boas-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

After Sapir’s teacher and sponsor, Franz Boas

von-Humboldt-Boas-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

Wilhelm von Humboldt

“Each language sets certain limits to the spirit of those who speak it; it assumes a certain direction and, by doing so, excludes many others.”

Whorf on Hopi (as a metonym)

I find it gratuitous to assume that a Hopi who knows only the Hopi language and the cultural ideas of his own society has the same notions, often supposed to be intuitions, of time and space that we have, and that are generally assumed to be universal. In particular, he has no general notion or intuition of time as a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at an equal rate, out of a future, through a present, into a past...

In [the] Hopi view, time disappears and space is altered, so that it is no longer the homogeneous and instantaneous timeless space of our supposed intuition or all classical Newtonian mechanics.

Language, thought, and reality (56, 58).
Eskimo words for “snow”

There was an unexpected delay in construction when Nanook forgot the first rule of igloo building: Always refill the tray.

Eskimo words for “snow”

qanik
• snowflakes in the air
aput
• snow on the ground

The Dictionary of the West Greenlandic Eskimo Language
Eskimo words for "snow"

24 under "very generous" construal
- e.g., words for "stuff for sinking habitually into"
- "blizzard"
- "avalanche"

Yup'ik Eskimo Dictionary

English

snow
slush
powder
hardpack
corn
avalanche

English

blizzard
sleet
snowstorm
flurry
squall
frost
hoarfrost
rime
English

- snowflake
- snowdrift
- snowfall
- snowfort
- snowball
- snowbank
- snowcapped

English word quiz
Lexicalization

Lexical elaboration

big berthas (from large German artillery gun in WWI), big McDuffs, boob, boobie, bosom, boulders, brace and bits, breast, brists, bubbies, bubs, buds, buffers, cantaloupes, champagne glass, chi-chi, chubbies, coconuts, Dolly Partons (from the country singer), double barrel, Double Lotus Peak (Taoist spiritual), droppers, dugs, fun cushions, globes, grapefruits, headlights, hooters, hummers, jug, knockers, lungs, mammary, melon, milk wagons, muffins, norks, pair, puppies, rack ski slopes, tabs, ta tas, teat, thirty-eights, thr’penny bits, tit, tittle, twin mounds, top bullocks, tweeters, twin peaks, woofers, yo
Navajo kinship (partial)

- haksołl: grandmother and her sisters
- haksołl: grandfather and his brothers
- no'yeł: mother and mother's sister
- ha'nił: father and father's brother
- hakno'she: mother's brother
- acelłak: father's sister

---

Navajo and motion

- ḱ stimuli: one moves into clothing
- mi stimuli: one moves about here and there
- ḱ ani stimuli: one moves about newly
- ha'li stimuli: to move words out of an enclosed space

---

Navajo and motion

- ḱ stimuli: one dresses
- mi stimuli: one moves about here and there
- ḱ ani stimuli: one moves about newly
- ha'li stimuli: to move words out of an enclosed space
Navajo and motion

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}čiháhí} one dresses
\textit{\textsuperscript{r}ííháhí} one lives

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}ánííháháhá} one moves about newly
\textit{\textsuperscript{h}áádítííhá} to move words out of an enclosed space

English 306A; Harris

---

Navajo and motion

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}čiháhí} one dresses
\textit{\textsuperscript{r}ííháhí} one lives

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}ánííháháhá} one is young
\textit{\textsuperscript{h}áádítííhá} to move words out of an enclosed space

English 306A; Harris

---

Navajo and motion

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}čiháhí} one dresses
\textit{\textsuperscript{r}ííháhí} one lives

\textit{\textsuperscript{1}ánííháháhá} one is young
\textit{\textsuperscript{h}áádítííhá} to sing

English 306A; Harris
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.

Navajo worldview (Weltsicht)

What is it?
Who knows?
Navajo worldview (Weltsicht)

What is it?
Who knows?
Is it the same as the SAE worldview?
No.

Navajo worldview (Weltsicht)

What is it?
Who knows?
Is it the same as the SAE worldview?
No.
Is it compatible with the SAE worldview?
Sometimes.

Navajo and “control”

Navajo kicking [yurila]
The horse kicked the mule.
The mule kicked the horse.
The man kicked the horse.
*The horse kicked the man.
Navajo and “control”

Navajo kicking [yizta]
The horse kicked the mule.
The horse controlled the action.
The horse struck the mule with its foot/feet.
The mule did not help bring this action about.

English
The horse kicked the mule.
The horse controlled the action.
The horse struck the mule with its foot/feet.
The mule did not help bring this action about.
Semantic Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>The entity that performs the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencer</td>
<td>The entity that experiences the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>The object used to perform the action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>The entity undergoing the action; the object of the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>The starting point for a movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>The end point for a movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The place an action happens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Navajo Agency

yiztał
mules and horses, reciprocal agency
non-human-animate, non-human-animate
humans and horses (and mules), unilateral agency
human, non-human-animate

Semantic primes

I, YOU, SOMEONE, WANT, HEAR, NOT, CAUSE, BECOME, AND, GOOD, BAD, WORD, MALE, FEMALE, HAVE, ...
Navajo and motion

\`eh\`eh \text{SOMEONE GO INTO CLOTHING}
na\`eha \text{SOMEONE GO HERE AND THERE}
\`anil\`iha\`ha \text{SOMEONE NEW GO}
\`ah\`i\`i\`ha \text{TO CAUSE WORDS GO OUT FROM CONTAINER}

English 306A; Harris 46

Navajo and causation

English

I am riding the horse.
I AM ON HORSE. I CAUSE HORSE GO

Navajo

The horse runs for me.
I AM ON HORSE. HORSE CAUSE HORSE GO.

English 306A; Harris 47

Colour terms

2-color system: black, white
3-color system: black, white, red
4-color system: black, white, red, yellow or GRUE
5-color system: black, white, red, yellow, GRUE
6-color system: black, white, red, yellow, green, blue
then purple, pink, orange, gray

English 306A; Harris 48
Colour, language, perception

Colour terms

white ➔ red ➔ yellow ➔ green ➔ purple
black ➔ yellow ➔ GRUE ➔ blue ➔ pink

GRUE ➔ yellow ➔ green ➔ blue ➔ purple

pink ➔ orange ➔ gray
There is something about the world, our brains, or our eyes (or any combination thereof) that constrains lexicalization.

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)
Cross-linguistic calibrators

Semantic primes.
Semantic roles.
Event schema.
Perception.
(goodwill, common-interests, …)

Linguistic relativity hypothesis

Strong form
Language determines thought;
speakers of different
languages inhabit different,
mutually inaccessible realities

Weak form
Language influences thought

Linguistic relativity hypothesis

Strong form
Language determines thought;
speakers of different
languages inhabit different,
mutually inaccessible realities

Weak form
Language influences thought

Translation is impossible.
Linguistic relativity hypothesis

Strong form
Language determines thought; speakers of different languages inhabit different, mutually inaccessible realities

Weak form
Language influences thought

Translation is impossible.

There are cultural misunderstandings.

Linguistic relativity hypothesis

Strong form
Language determines thought; speakers of different languages inhabit different, mutually inaccessible realities

Weak form
Language influences thought

There are cultural misunderstandings.
Linguistic relativity hypothesis

Strong form
Language determines thought; speakers of different languages inhabit different, mutually inaccessible realities

Weak form
Language influences thought
There are cultural misunderstandings.

Semantics
The proposition and truth conditions.
Entailment, paraphrase
Denotation
Intension
Extension
Event schemas and semantic roles redux.
Semantic primes
Ambiguity

Linguistic relativity