

THE TEACHING & LEARNING OF

SOCIOLINGUISTICS



*Words and Culture*

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# OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Language and culture
- Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
- FAQ's
- Conclusion

# WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

- Language- is a system of sounds, words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other

# WHAT IS CULTURE?

- Culture- is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, that members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation.

# INTRODUCTION

The exact nature of the relationship between language and culture has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

That there should be some kind of relationship between the sounds, words, and syntax of a language and the ways in which speakers of that language experience the world and behave in it seems so obvious as to be a truism.

- A few words are necessary concerning what I mean by 'culture.' I do not intend to use the term *culture* in the sense of 'high culture,' i.e., the appreciation of music, literature, the arts, and so on. Rather, I intend to use it in the sense of whatever a person must know in order to function in a particular society. This is the same sense as in Goodenough's well-known definition (1957, p. 167): 'a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.' That knowledge is socially acquired: the necessary behaviors are learned and do not come from any kind of genetic endowment. Culture, therefore, is the 'know-how' that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living; only for a few does it require a knowledge of some, or much, music, literature, and the arts

# Edward Sapir Benjamin Lee Whorf



"Language is not only for expression but also helps organise our thought. Diverse languages impose different conceptual categories on their speakers."



# EDWARD SAPIR (1884-1939)

- Pronunciation: shu PEER
- American anthropologist-linguist; a leader in American structural linguistics.
- Author of language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech
- Born in Lauenberg, Germany
- Pupil of Franz Boaz, teacher of Benjamin Whorf

- Sapir studied languages of the Pacific coast of North America; his work was comparable to Descriptivism but differed from Behaviorism; patterns revealed by linguistic analysis were patterns in speakers' minds.

- “language shapes the way think and determines what we can think about.”

-Benjamin Lee Whorf-

# DOES LANGUAGE SHAPE THE WAY WE THINK?

- [sw hypothesis\VIDEOS\sapirwhorf.mp4](#)

# BENJAMIN LEE WHORF

- He graduated from the MIT in 1918 with a degree in Chemical Engineering and shortly afterwards began work as a fire prevention engineer (inspector)
- Although he met, and later studied with Edward Sapir, he never took up linguistics as a profession
- Whorf's primary area of interest in linguistics was the study of native American languages.

- He became quite well known for his work on the Hopí language.
- He was considered to be a captivating speaker and did much to popularize his linguistic ideas through popular lectures and articles written to be accessible to lay readers.
- Whorf - detailed analysis of certain American Indian languages
- The worldview is molded by language

# SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS 1

- The structure of one's language influences the manner in which one perceives and understands the world
- Therefore, speakers of different languages will perceive the world differently

# LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

- People who speak different languages perceive and experience the world differently relative to their linguistic backgrounds.
- The principle of linguistic relativity holds that the structure of a language affects its speakers' world view or cognition.

Popularly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or Whorfianism, the principle is often defined to include two versions.



- Structural differences between languages are paralleled by non-linguistic cognitive differences (the structure of the language itself effects cognition)
- The number and the type of the basic colour words of a language determine how a subject sees rain bow

# SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS 2

## LINGUISTIC DETERMINISM

The language we use determines the way we view and think about the world around us. Learning a new language changes our ways of thinking.

- The structure of a language can strongly influence or determine someone's world view
- A world view describes a (hopefully) consistent and integral sense of existence and provides a theoretical framework for generating, sustaining and applying knowledge
- The *Inuit* can think more intelligently about snow because their language contains more sophisticated and subtle words distinguishing various forms of it, etc.

# ARBITRARINESS

- The semantic systems of different languages vary without constraint.
- This hypothesis must be tacitly assumed, because otherwise the claim that Linguistic Relativity makes is rather undramatic.

# ARRIVAL

- [sw hypothesis\VIDEOS\ARRIVAL- Linguistic Relativity & Time Perception Are Real.mp4](#)

# CRITICISM

- Whorf's inability to allow for the radical changes of world-view within a given linguistic community.
- The history of science has been a history of repeated radical changes of world-view, almost all of which occurred within the Standard Average European linguistic framework.

- Language of a community ↔ thought of individual members
- How individual influences language?
- Sapir - individuals being 'at the mercy of' their language; 'tyrannical hold' over their mind
- Whorf - speakers are parties to an 'absolutely obligatory' agreement to conceptualize the world in a certain way

## *So far so good?*

1. Some cognitive tasks may be affected by implicit access to the participants' native language (hence the importance to use non-linguistic tasks).
2. Differences in non-linguistic tasks may be the result of 'life-experience' due to background difference, rather than languages.
3. Behavioural measurements only show the 'end-product' of cognitive processes.

# CONCLUSION

- We categorize based on our language
- We allow our language to preempt the decisions we make
- We are not “helpless prisoners” of our language

“language produces transient modulation of ongoing perceptual processing – the label-feedback effect” (Lupyan, 2012).



- [SociolinguisticsREP.pptx](#)