

WELCOME TO ANTH 200

Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology
"Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery"
~ Mark Twain

What is this class about?

- How is language distinctly human?
- How diverse are human languages?
- How do humans use language?
- How are language and culture related?
- What does language do for us socially?
- How does culture shape language?
- How are language and social difference interrelated?

The Point(s) of the Class

- Language is an extremely important part of being human.
 - **Therefore: Studying language can give us greater insight into human cultures.**
- Human language and human culture are very difficult to separate.
 - How could you study culture without studying language?
 - Examples?

Course Topics – Early semester

- Areas of linguistics and the problem of defining “a language”
- Introduction to the **structure** of human language (sounds, words, meaning, articulation, etc.)
- Origins of human language
- Nonverbal communication and other primate communication systems
- Language **Change**

Course Topics –Middle semester

- Language structure and **worldview**
- Language and Dialect
- Doing things with words
- Conversational collusion
- Language socialization

Course Topics – Late semester

- Language **Ideology**
- Language and race in the US
- Language and gender across cultures
- Bilingualism and Multilingualism
- Language rights/language movements

Any questions?

...are you SURE

...really REALLY sure?

... then let's BEGIN!

What is Linguistic Anthropology?

- **Sociolinguistics:** study of language and society, how language helps to divide people into social groups, and how these linguistically-based power divisions change or are maintained.
 - **Language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction.**
- **Linguistic anthropology:** study of human language as part of human culture. Study of the ways that human beings use language to create a cultural model of the world and how that model influences the way they live their lives.

Examples: Sociolinguistics

- In New York City, **r-deletion** ("cah") correlates with class.
 - What is the correlation?
- As the usage of a language varies from place to place (dialects) language usage varies among social classes (called "**sociolects**")
 - Sociolects can also vary according to gender, age, or by setting.
 - How many sociolects do you speak?
 - In some ways, sociolects and dialects are **linked**.
 - Examples: Cultural attitudes in Italy between Neapolitan, Sicilian, and Italian

Examples: Linguistic Anthropology

- In the Vaupes region of the Amazon basin, marriage is **exogamous** based on language groups – so each person’s mother and father speak different languages.
- In many cultures, directness is considered impolite, so people may never say “no” or make a request directly, but communicate refusal and requests in other indirect, but culturally recognized, ways.

Why is Ling Anth interesting?

- **Related to other fields of anthropology**
 - Cultural Anthro
 - Biological Anthro
 - Archaeology
- It gets at “what makes us human”
- Allows us to see how culture and society work in ways that we never noticed before.
 - Increases our capacity to become “culturally competent” in a wide range of situations.
- Language “works best” when we aren’t thinking about it – so we often don’t fully understand how powerful it is in shaping our lives.

Examples of unconscious language:

- How close do you stand to someone when you’re talking to them?
- How is the way you talk to your professors different from the way you talk to your friends?
- What does “Yo” really mean? Sick? Dope? Fierce? Killer? Hella? Cheddar?
- What is “girl talk” and “guy talk”? How do we learn and begin to **frame** our interactions with people?

Language vs. a particular language

*****Language is a human universal*****

- All languages serve their speakers equally well, from the point of view of achieving communication.
- Remember language can be spoken and unspoken, written, performed, heard, not heard, and unwritten!
- We will study both the universal and particular aspects of language using data from individual languages or sets of languages.

Language is always changing

- Every language is *dynamic*, in other words, it keeps changing, either in response to the needs of its speakers, or just as the natural effect of many people using it every day.
- However, at times we neglect this dynamism!
 - We fail to appreciate our capacities for communication (and miscommunication!) and the power of our words.

What is language good for?

At least for today, language is good for expression!

- He works as a sanitation technician.
- Ain't nobody gonna give you stuff for free.
- I'd like a egg cream.
- Dude! Duuuuude; seriously, Dude. Aw, dude! Dude?
- I feel blue.
- **Anger came to her head with a click (Japanese).**

Features of language

Often we think of language as following "correct" formulas and functioning primarily to communicate referential information about the world. In fact, language is also:

- **Complex**
- **Creative**
- **Social**
- **Dynamic**

How are we to begin studying these features of language?

(Linguistic) Anthropology

- **Holistic** – focused on language in the larger context of culture/ human life
- **Comparative** – based on comparisons between linguistic/ cultural ("langugculture") systems, again seen in a holistic way
- **Fieldwork-based** – relies on data from real, naturally-occurring speech in cultural context

Theoretical linguistics

- Focuses on underlying structures and features to understand the nature of human language
- Not too interested in “real” cultural or social contexts; focused on “ideal” language use
- Often collect data out of context – e.g. asking native speakers to judge whether a particular sentence structure “feels” right.
 - Sociolinguists tell us that standards of correctness vary from place to place and over time, so begs the answer...

...it depends.

Traditional areas of linguistics:

- **Phonetics:** study of the sounds of human language
 - Meaningful sounds vary from language to language!
- **Phonology (phonemics):** study of sound systems in particular languages
- **Morphology:** study of word formation and the “parts” of words
- **Syntax:** study of how words relate to each other in a language (“grammar”)

Traditional areas of linguistics:

- **Semantics:** study of word meanings; not just “dictionary definitions,” but also the underlying meaning of words
- **Pragmatics:** study of words-as-actions, the effects of utterances

Why is language human?

- Language makes us human – allows us to participate in the life of our social group
 - **Language use symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behavior and human interaction.**
- We can not live social lives, raise our young, or survive as a group without language
 - In what ways?
- We use language in extremely complex ways; for both communication and social action
 - Examples?
- We have an extremely unique biology and brain!

Human language has fixed parameters that are in part determined by:

- **biological structures:** structures associated with the apparatus of language production and perception: what sounds humans are capable of producing, hearing, and differentiating among and between

- **cognitive (brain) structures:** there appears to be a limited range of structures that all languages use in different ways, and this may be related to the way the human brain works (more on this later!)

Language and Culture

- Anthropologist Michael Agar points out that we tend to think of “culture” as some *thing* that we have. Then we can imagine all of those different “cultures” lined up like distinct items.
- Culture, like language, is *not* something you have, it’s a **set of things that you do**, and more importantly a **set of frames of reference** you use in everyday life.

What is “culture”

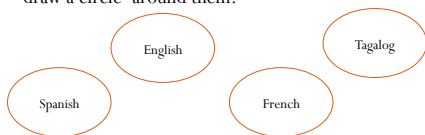
- Culture is a set of things we do (“practices”) that allow us to make sense of the day to day world
- Culture is a set of rules that allows us to understand and interpret what is going on around us; since these rules are shared (more or less), people in the same culture often have similar interpretations.

Examples

- Ketchup on scrambled eggs?
- Wearing black to a wedding?
- Addressing a person you don’t know as “Miss, Ma’am or Sir”
- Speaking your own secret language to a friend when other people around you can’t understand what you are saying?
- Even misinterpretations by outsiders are familiar to members of the same culture.

Agar’s “The Circle”

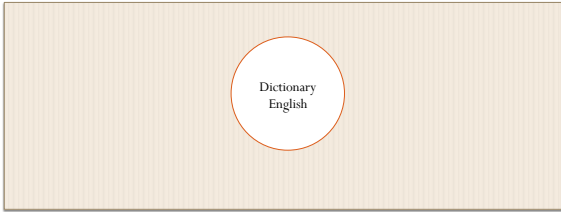
- Agar argues that in the US, we often imagine languages and cultures as separate, clearly outlined units, as if we could “draw a circle” around them:



- “Inside the circle” is the dictionary form of a language – grammar rules, vocabulary, pronunciation guides, spelling variations.

Outside the circle

Agar argues that we need to be more interested in what is outside the circle – cultural elements, ways of interpreting words, actions, and intonations that you can only learn through experience, not by reading a dictionary.



Language is more than:

- ...just a coding system to represent objects in the world [more than "inside the circle"]
- ...just what we can immediately access about language without close study. Most of us are unaware of the sounds and structures of our everyday language use, let alone the cultural assumptions that help us to make sense of things.

Structuring the world

beef	cow
pork	pig
venison	deer
mutton	sheep
?????	Dog
?????	Cat
?????	Horse

Semantic variation

- In every social group, some variations in linguistic forms (= events) are *socially significant* (= *value*), and others are often ignored.

Example:

- I need to find a bathroom.
- I need to find a restroom.
- I need to find a washroom. (Canadian)
- I need to find a toilet. (British)

Semantic Change

- How are social change and semantic change related?
- Examples:
 - “tweaking”
 - “green”
 - Thousands more!

Example from Agar: Dating

- What is a “date”?
- How do you ask someone out on a date? When you issue an invitation, how do you tell whether it is/is not a date invitation?
- Within the **taxonomy** of dating words, how are some dates different than others?
 - Take a few minutes and write down several **taxa** for dating vocabulary.
