Culture and Language

What We Say Influences What We Think, What We Feel and What We Believe
Unique Human Ability

• Ability to create and use language is the most distinctive feature of humans
• Humans learn their culture through language
• Culture is transmitted through language
THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

• Considerable variation in the number of languages in the world
• 95% of the world’s people speak fewer that 100 of the approximate 6,000 different languages
• Linguists concerned about the last 5% of the world’s languages which are in danger of disappearing
Language Moribund

• Moribund—spoken only by a few older people and unknown to children
• Perhaps as many as 90% of all world languages will be extinct or moribund within the next 100 years
• An entire way of thinking is lost each time a language becomes extinct
Seven functions of Language

- Instrumental Language
- Regulatory Language
- Interactional Language
- Personal Language

- Imaginative Language
- Heuristic Language
- Informative Language
Instrumental Language

• What we use to get what we want, to satisfy needs or desires
• Early stages it may be to satisfy simple needs and wants
• Later sophisticated; may take the form of polite requests
• Still later becomes more complex, takes form of persuasion and argument
Regulatory Language

• Using language to control the behavior of others or getting them to do what we want them to do

• May include giving orders or at more subtle levels manipulating and controlling others

• Positive regulatory language is “life skills” of parents, management and administrator must know
Interactional Language

• Used to establish and define social relationships and language all of us use in group situation
• “small talk”, negotiations, encouragement, expression of friendship are examples
• Because those who are effective in building social skills are likely to succeed, children need to develop need to develop awareness of the ability to use language to establish relationships
• Work cooperatively, enjoy companionship
Personal Language

• Used to express individuality and personality
• Strong feelings and opinions are a part of personal language
• Often neglected in classrooms and thought inappropriate.
• Yet through personal language that students relate their own lives to the subject matter being taught establish their own identities, build self-esteem and confidence
Imaginative Language

• Used to create a world of one’s own, to express fantasy through dramatic play, drama, poetry or stories

• Unless it is fostered, it will rapidly disappear in later years. Its importance cannot be underestimated

• How difficult some teachers find it to get students to write with imagination
Heuristic Language

- Used to explore, to investigate, to acquire knowledge, to do research, to acquire understanding
- It is the language for wondering, for figuring things out
- Inquiry is its most important function
- Dense Textbooks?
Informative Language

• Used to communicate information, to report facts or conclusions from facts. It is the language of teachers
• Give information and help synthesize information
• Give information in format people learn best
Communication

• The act of transmitting information that influences the behavior of another person
• While communication among animals is critical to their survival, it is limited compared to human language
Call Systems

- Animal systems of verbal communication are referred to as call system.
- Call system—a form of communication among non-human primates composed of a limited number of sounds that are limited to specific stimuli in the environment.
- Chimp—"Squeal Squeal" —”danger here”
- “Closed System”
Call System/Closed System

- Primate Communication system is complex
- Non-Human Primate have a Closed Call System
- Sounds are unique in form and message
- Sounds are mutually exclusive
- Can’t signal “Tomorrow I’ll climb that tree”
Humans/Open Call System

- Starting with a limited number of sounds. Humans are capable of producing an infinite number of meanings by combining sounds and words into new meanings.
- Can send messages that have never been sent before.
- Can talk about things not present and have yet to happen.
Washoe

• Chimps and Gorillas have latent capacity for language
• Do not have physical vocal equipment to produce speech as Human know it
• Washoe
• Taught Sign Language
• Initiates “Speech”
• Teaches daughter “Sign Language”
Human Language

• Is capable of recreating and complex thought patterns and experiences in words
• Without human language, human culture would not exist
• Plays a crucial role in the maintenance of human social relationships
• Because language is a creative and open system it is extremely flexible and can communicate new ideas and abstract concepts
Displacement

- Human capacity to convey information about a thing or an event that is not present
- Enables humans to speak of purely hypothetical things
- Transmitted largely through tradition experience alone
Human Language

• Come “wired” to learn any language
• Anatomy—voice box
• Unique and distinct from any other animal communication system
• Degree of difference between human and non-human forms of communication remains immense
Arbitrary

• No necessary connection between the thing and object
• Speakers agreement
• “pen” or “pencil”
Conventionality

- In human language, a limited number of sounds—hardly any language uses more than 50—are combined to refer to thousands of different things and experiences.
- Ability to recombine sounds to create new meanings that makes human language such an efficient and effective communication system.
Question

• What are some new words that have appeared in the past 60 years?
Second Characteristic--Productivity

• The idea that humans can combine words and sounds into new meaningful utterances they have never before heard
• Speakers of any human language can generate an almost infinite number of such sentences
• Productivity a.k.a. “Openness” makes human language extremely flexible, conveying all kinds of new information
Language and Culture

• Anthropologist learn to communicate in another language in order to do field work
• Language reflects a Way of Thinking
• Close relationship between language and culture. Culture is transmitted by language
• Clear that the terminology used by a culture primarily reflects that culture’s interest and concerns
How Culture Influences Culture

• Cultural emphasis—the vocabulary found in any language tends to emphasize the words that are considered to be adaptively important in that culture
• Military metaphor in medicine
• Technology also affects language
Acquiring language

• Linguistic symbols are all arbitrary—that is they are conventions by which certain sounds are attached to certain objects and events
• C/A/R=car
• Humans’ normal physical and mental apparatus allows them to learn any language with equal ease
Acquiring Language

• Human Being would speak no language if he or she were taught none
• Critical period of language development for humans before the age of six—thereafter learning language skills become increasingly difficult
Children Language Acquisition

• All human children go through same stages of language learning which appear to be sequenced regardless of language they are learning

• 6 months old babbling includes consonant and vowel sequences and repetitive patterning

• Imitate but also take initiative to form combinations of words they may never have heard
Children’s Speech

• Even when children do not understand what they are saying, they can speak grammatically, using the different parts of speech in correct relation to one another

• Parents everywhere modify their speech when talking to small children

• Taking in simple sentences only about here and now
Universal Grammar

• Noam Chomsky Universal Grammar—basic set of principles, conditions and rules that underlie all languages
• Children learn language by applying this unconscious universal grammar to the sounds they hear
• As children learn to speak, they master a specific grammar system that has been imbedded in a universal grammar
Children Acquisition of language

• A child “programs” her or his language by interacting verbally with other people automatically, apparently without conscious effort

• Acquisition of language is based in biology, the acceptable use of speech to participate in a community must be learned culturally
Structure of Language

• Every language has logical structure
• All languages have rules and principles governing what sounds are to be used and how those sounds are to be combined to convey meaning
• Dog, frog
Two Aspects of Structure Of Language

• A sound structure-phonology
• A grammatical structure
• Descriptive Linguist studies both the sound system and the grammatical system of as many human languages as possible
Phonology

• No single language uses all possible sounds
• Phonemes: the minimal units of sound that signal a difference in meaning
• T/H/E/I/R and T/H/E/R/E
• English language=46 phonemes other languages vary from 15 to 100 phonemes
Morphemes

- Two or more phonemes can be combined to form a morpheme
- Should not equate morphemes with words
- Majority of words in any language are made up of two or more morphemes
- Free Morphemes stand alone=Toast
- Bounded Morphemes have no meaning except when attached to morpheme
- Toast +er=Toaster
Grammar

• A highly complex set of rules for combining sounds into phonemes, phonemes into morphemes and morphemes into words and words into grammar

• Two parts: Morphology; set of rules for how morphemes are formed into words. Syntax: principles for how words are arranges into phrases and sentences
Are Some Languages Superior To Others

- Until start of 20th century, European linguists were convinced that Western languages were superior to others
- Anthropologists have shown that people from technologically simple societies are not less capable of expressing a variety of abstract ideas
- No one language is more efficient at expressing abstract ideas than others
Sociolinguistics

- Speaker’s use of language
- Who says what to whom, when, where and why
- Code Switching
- Non-Standard forms of English (Ebonics) are fully efficient languages with their own unique set of grammatical rules that are consistently applied