

Language, Culture, and Cognition

Anthropology 3601.10

Fall 2013

Instructor: Dr. Alexander S. Dent

Lecture & Class Time: T & R 2:20 -3:35PM

Lecture Location: Corcoran 111

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Office Location: 2110 G. St. Rm. 302
(Hortense Amsterdam House)

Office hours: R noon – 2PM

Or by appointment



Introduction

What is the relationship between language and thought? *Can* we, in fact, think without language of some kind? If we accept that language has at least *some* impact on our thoughts, then we are led to another set of questions. What influence does the language we use the *most* have on the way we think? What difference does it make that one person thinks in Hopi, another in English, and yet another in Spanish?

This course tackles these questions by making use of anthropology's fundamental concepts and methods. Rather than consider such questions in isolation from their social contexts, we will embed them in situations of use. In other words, we will bring "culture" to bear as we examine the possibility that speakers of different languages to some extent live in different worlds. We will call upon specific examples gathered through fieldwork to illuminate these problems.

Starting with the fundamental work of Benjamin Lee Whorf, we will move on to think about the way in which communicative practice influences thought and action in: the interpretation of color, plants, kin terms, and personal names; the description and interpretation of emotional experience; and the classification of musical experience.

ANTH 3601 elaborates upon concepts developed in ANTH 1004. ANTH 1004 is therefore a fixed requirement for this class. ANTH 3601 also provides a bridge to other language-related anthropology classes, such as "The Ethnography of Speaking," and "Media, Technology, and Performance."

Please note that early drafts of the syllabus sometimes contain typos. The working copy of the syllabus is always the one available on Blackboard.

Learning Goals (Specific)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- evaluate the influence that language has on speaking, writing, and other forms of communication (such as music, politics, dance, and economic behavior)
- analyze the influence of language on cognition
- apply "semiotic" (sign-based) techniques to communication in various environments
- analyze ethnographic and historical data in light of how language and culture structure human activity

Learning Goals (general)

This course will contribute to student mastery of:

- critical thinking skills, where critical thinking is defined as analyzing and engaging with the concepts that underlie an argument
- cross-cultural perspectives, where international institutions and practices are analyzed, and the importance of cultural knowledge is emphasized as a fundamental aspect of human nature
- written communication skills, which will be evaluated in the paper, quiz, and exams; oral communication skills will be evaluated through “class participation,” though oral communication skills will not necessarily be a primary focus

Course Requirements

1) Class participation, and attendance – 20 % (14% attendance at lectures and discussions; 6% participation)

Absences will have a profound effect on each grade for a variety of reasons. First, all material from discussions, lectures, films, and readings will be tested on the midterm and final. But also, knowledge will be cumulative, and in lectures, I will reference previous topics. For this reason, students must: 1) attend every lecture and discussion; 2) complete reading for that class *before* the class; 3) complete in-class assignments; 4) contribute to in-class discussion, some of which will take place in small groups; and 5) practice ‘academic integrity’ (see below). One or two of our classes will take place digitally (on Blackboard) and these five points will apply in those cases as well. *There will be no make-ups for missed assignments or exams.* Based on your comments in class, I will award six (6) points for in-class participation, so if you want to do well in class, speak up; in borderline cases, this seemingly tiny five percent can really make a difference. *If you are the kind of person who is embarrassed to speak up, try to work through this fear as best you can. Keep in mind that coming to office hours and sending an email about a question may also count towards participation in some circumstances.* – **total of 6 pts. for participation**

I will distribute a sign-in sheet at the beginning of every class. You will receive a half point for each class attended. Reasons for an excused absence, as stated above, include an immediate family emergency, or an illness for which you can provide some kind of documentation. (If you sign-in for an absent friend, trying to “cover” for them, you will both receive zero, and if this occurs more than once, it will be treated as a violation of academic integrity.) – **total of 14 pts. for attendance**

*If you need to miss a class or lecture for a **religious holiday**, you need to let me know by email within the first two weeks of class. Last minute religious holiday requests cannot be honored. In the email, place the words “religious holiday” and your name in the subject line.*

2) Midterm exam -- 25% -- October 10th

The exam will take place in the same location as our regular class. I will provide more information on exam structure in-class, closer to the date of the exam. *There will be no makeups for missing the midterm.*

3) Paper – 20% -- Due November 14th

20 – 25 pp. ethnography (observation & analysis, 12pt. font, standard margins, double spaced) paper on the relationship between language and emotion.

This paper asks you to apply course concepts to language in a *particular* situation that you observe. You should attend and observe some kind of public performance. This could be a religious service, a political speech, a musical concert, a play, a community meeting, a party, and so forth. Pick a portion of what you have observed – a moment, a story, or some other segment of it – and analyze that piece for emotional content. Describe the evidence of emotion in language use. What structures in the language are implicated? What emotions do these structures reflect?

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You will need to plan ahead in order to accomplish this by the deadline; don't try to do this the night before it's due. Think carefully about what you would like to observe, and how you will keep records of what you observe, keeping in mind that tape-recording people without their permission is not permitted.

Before or after the performance, interview someone associated with it (an audience member or a performer, perhaps) and discuss the presence and/or absence of emotion. How does language use shape approaches to emotion?

*[Note – it is important in any situation you observe to let people know what you are doing. If it is a context outside GW, let them know that you are a student at GWU, that you are doing a class project, that you have NO intention of publishing this material, that you will use a pseudonym for them in your paper, and that not only do they **not** have to participate, but they can end participation at any time if they would like to. Always get permission if you want to record someone. It is crucial that you present yourself as a student, and that you do not present yourself as someone you are not – which is unethical in Anthropology.]*

*The paper is due at the **start** of class on November 14th. I deduct 1/3 of a grade for each day the paper is late. Thus, at 9:36am, November 14th the paper is a day late. By a third of a grade, I mean that if your paper was an A, but you turned it in to me a day late, it automatically becomes an A-. If it was an A-, it becomes a B+. And so forth.*

I will hand out a rubric in class that discusses the grading scheme for the paper.

4) Final Assignment– 35% -- take home

The assignment is **cumulative** – which means to say that it covers the entire semester. I will provide more information on the assignment's structure in-class, closer to the date of the assignment. It will be handed out at the end of the last class 12/5. It will be due by 5PM, 12/9. The assignment must be handed in through the course's Blackboard site.

Grading scale used in this course:

A	93% or higher
A-	90-92%
B+	88-89%
B	83-7%
B-	80-82% ... and so on ...

Academic Integrity

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use *the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must:* 1) identify quotations with quotations marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes, or use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

*The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you are caught cheating on any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will then be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be **clearly** notified by the instructor in person **or** by email before the Council is informed.*

Special Needs

Please let me know right away if you have any special needs with respect to how this course will be conducted.

Reading

Required reading will be available in the GW bookstore. Other chapters and articles will be available on the course's Blackboard site, or will be handed out in class.

Required Books

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. (John B Carroll, ed.). 1956. *Language, Thought and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
("Whorf," below)

Dent, Alexander. 2009. *River of Tears: Country Music, Memory, and Modernity in Brazil*. ("Dent")

Lutz, Catherine. 1988. *Unnatural Emotions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ("Lutz")

A Few "Do's and Do Not's"

a) **Do not** email me asking for a class outline for a class that you missed. Instead, **DO** make a "note-buddy" on the first day of class, and get the class outline from that note-buddy if you should miss a class.

b) **Do not** email me with reasons that you will miss a class, or reasons that you missed one. Reasons for missing a class are limited, and include an emergency in your immediate family (distant relations, I fear, do not count), or some kind of medical condition or emergency for which you can provide documentation. If such misfortunes should come up, you should, of course, let me know.

c) **Do** come to me early in the semester with questions or concerns about the course. Leaving these till the last minute will lead to your frustration.

d) **Do** come to talk to me about your paper topic and approach.

e) **Do** show up to class on time, ready to work.

Section I – Relativity and Grammatical Function

Week 1

T 8/27 -- Introduction

What is the relationship between language and thought?

What special insight can anthropology provide?

R 8/29 – Expanding the Sign

Reading:

Excerpt from Hanks, William. 1996. *Language and Communicative Practices*. Westview Press. Pp. 21-54.

Week 2 -- Whorf on Language and Linguistics

T 9/3

Reading:

Whorf, "Science and Linguistics"

R 9/5

Reading

Whorf, "Linguistics as an Exact Science," and "Languages and Logic"

Week 3 – Whorf Continued – Habitual Thought

T 9/10

Reading:

Whorf, "A Linguistic Consideration of Thinking in Primitive Communities"

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R 9/12

Reading:

Whorf, "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language"

Week 4 – Whorf's Legacy

T 9/17

Reading:

Lucy, John. "The Scope of Linguistic Relativity"

R 9/20

Reading:

Slobin, Dan. "From 'Thought and Language' to 'Thinking for Speaking'"

Week 5 – Typologies

T 9/24

Reading:

Frake, Charles. "The Ethnographic Study of Cognitive Systems"

Conklin, Harold. "Comment"

R 9/26

Reading:

Conklin, Harold C. "Review of Basic Color Terms"

Charles Goodwin "The Blackness of Black: Color Categories as Situated Practice"

Week 6 – Relativity Continued

T 10/1

Reading:

Hanks, "Language Form and Communicative Practices"

Haviland, "Projections, Transpositions, and Relativity"

R 10/3

Reading:

Ochs, Elinor. "Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity"

Week 7 – Midterm Week

T 10/8

Review

R 10/10

Midterm (same as class location)

Section II – Language's Social Worlds

Week 8 – Emotions and Classifications

T 10/15

In-Class Movie: *Speaking in Tongues*

Reading:

R 10/17

Reading:

Feld – Introduction & chapter 1

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Week 9 – Landscapes, Locations, and Emotions

T 10/22

Reading:

Feld – chapters 2 & 3

R 10/24

Reading:

Lutz, Intro and chapter 1 & 2

Week 10 – Configuring Emotion

T 10/29

Reading:

Lutz, chapters 3, & 4

R 10/31

Reading:

Lutz, chapters 5, 6

Week 11 – Introducing Genre

T 11/5

Reading:

Lutz, chapters 7, 8 & epilogue

R 11/7

Reading:

Bauman & Briggs, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power”
Hanks “Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice”

Week 12 – Fields of Cultural Production

T 11/12

Reading:

Bourdieu “Fields of Cultural Production”

R 11/14

In-Class Film: *Francisco’s Two Sons*

Paper due at the beginning of class.

Week 13 –Central Tropes

T 11/19

Dent, Introduction & Chapters 1 & 2

R 11/21

Dent. Chapters 3, 4 & 5

Week 14 -- Tradition vs. Modernity

T 11/26

Dent. Chapters 6 & 7

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R 11/28

Thanksgiving

Week 15 -- Political Change and Emotion

T 12/3

Reading:

Dent. Chapter 8 & Conclusion

R 12/5

Review