

Subject name: Language and Society

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Today we will try to understand lessons between language and culture. Remember we are looking at a very complex relationship between language and society. The concept or the idea that is embedded in our understanding of culture, also interacts in a very complex way with society. So a combination of the three, that is, society, language and culture creates a very complex phenomena and in order to understand the relationship between language and culture, it is almost imperative that we do not avoid the discussion in culture.

In short, culture interacts and intersects the two language and society in a big way. We will try to understand with some examples and some work that has been done before and we will try to see how these two things work and how what kind of complexities, what kind of complex questions they create for us to understand and to answer first let us look at what culture and what language between

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Language and Culture

- Language
 - A complex and rule governed system of sounds, words and sentences.
- Culture
 - The way of life
 - Language plays a big role in the way people live, and the way people live shows up in language.



That we understand. Language is a complex and rule -governed system. It is a system of Sounds, Words and Sentences and then when we look at the lessons between language and society, we have established that what starts operating, in a big way is the understanding of language at the level of discourse. So, it is a complex system of arbitrary sounds, words,

sentences and discourse and then we have had, we have spent fair amount of time in understanding language

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Culture in the simplest possible description of the term is the way of life. Everything that an individual or a group of individuals which would form a community or a society would do, would constitute culture. Everything that we do is a part of culture. That is to say, in order to understand culture, we would need to pay attention to everything that an individual or a group attach and

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as we have seen language plays an important role in the way people live, and the way people's life work, it shows up in a big way in Language. In other words, language serves as a window for understanding culture and components of culture as well.

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Culture ...

- There is a complex homologous relationship between language and culture.
- 'Culture, then, began when speech was present; and from then on, the enrichment of either means the further development of the other.' Kroeber (1923)
- When learning language, children learn cultural complexities and develop their cognitive abilities as well.



Moving on, in our understanding of culture we would also like to say that the culture began when speech was present. And from then on, the enrichment of their means, the further development of the other. It only establishes the complex relationship between language and culture and what follows from the interactions and the relationship between the two, that is, the Language and Culture we understand

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Culture ...

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- 'Culture, then, began when speech was present; and from then on, the enrichment of either means the further development of the other.' Kroeber (1923)
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that while learning language, children learn cultural complexities as well and develop their cognitive abilities, that is, the development of cognitive abilities among children among learners includes components of culture and cultural complexities.

So the cultural component cannot be separated from learning and in particular learning of language. It is a part of the learning process and its part of the development of cognitive

abilities in the context of education. Piaget has a theory of cognitive development and he presents sets of arguments in support of that and there would be a position, which would not want to look at embedded cultural complexities in language, but for the purpose of understanding the kinds of lessons that we are witnessing between language and society.

We would like to understand and rather admit that, the cultural components of language is important for us to understand if we are trying to understand learning of language and they work in a very complex way.

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Language and Culture

- We acquire language with input from immediate environment.
- We do not acquire 'a language.'
- We do not acquire 'language (-culture)'.
- Language is culture and culture is language.



How we conclude this part is we acquire language with input from immediate environment. And we do not acquire a language, it has been, we establish that and what we want to add to that, we do not acquire language minus culture, that is, the cultural complexities, embedded in language becomes part of language, acquisition as well. That is the way the underline grammar of culture operates, is probably simultaneously with the underlying temptation of language that works in human mind.

So people have gone to the extent of saying things like language is culture, culture is language. Whether or not we agree with this term, with this type of description, is not really relevant for our discussion right now but we would want to understand this thing in their spirit and it appears to be the fact that if such a thing only talks about the role of cultural components in acquisition and learning of language.

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Language in Culture

- We know that language, thought and culture are closely related with each other, but what is the nature of this relationship?
- Does language determine culture or is it the other way around? What is primary: Language or thought?



So now we understand the relationship between language and culture. And how it is associated with language in an inseparable way. Then, when we move further we would like to know that language, thought and culture are closely related with each other but then we would need to understand what's the nature of such a relationship. Note with the language and culture we are bringing, thought, that is, how people think.

Please remember we have defined culture as a way of life and how people think in everything that they do which becomes eventually components of culture. The role of how the think is integrated with that and these things have got implications for with each other. We would definitely need to answer questions like, did language determine culture? or is it the other way round? what is primary, language or thought? What's the relationship between language and thought? Apart from culture does language determine our thought as well? These are the questions that has been answered one would like to answer these questions.

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Language in Culture

- We know that language, thought and culture are closely related with each other, but what is the nature of this relationship?
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Culture in Language

- The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
 - According to this hypothesis, thinking is dependent on language.
 - Language determines thought.
 - This strong notion is also called linguistic determinism.



The sort of answer comes from what is famously known as Sapir Whorf hypothesis a chemical engineer by professor Benjamin Whorf got interested in understanding complex relationship between language and thought. While he would studying language with one of the top linguistic of his time and would speak and the outcome of their project came to be known as Sapir Whorf hypothesis there are arguments in favour and against this hypothesis both.

We will also see how we find evidence in support of this argument and also against the fundamentals of Sapir Whorf hypothesis but let's understand first what Sapir Whorf hypothesis is about and how it helps us understand complex relationship between language and culture in particular and then also language and thought. (Refer Slide Time: 9:52)

So according to this hypothesis, thinking is dependent on language. That they start with this idea, that, language determines thought, and this is a stronger part of the hypothesis, it is also known in literature as linguistic determinism. In such a hypothesis with was arrived at or Benjamin Whorf started with this, while he was studying American Indian indigenous languages he has studied several of them to name a few like Hopi and Nootka and then he based on his time, that he is spent with these things and based on what he has found he presents certain arguments in support of his hypothesis. So the

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- The hypothesis also holds that because languages differ in many ways, speakers of different languages perceive and experience the world differently, relative to their linguistic background.
- Hence the notion of linguistic relativism.



same hypothesis which is known as Sapir Whorf hypothesis also holds that because language differ from one another in many ways, speakers of different languages perceive and experience the world differently, relative to their linguistic background. That is how an individual perceives the world is rooted in the language that the speaker has got or the language he speaks. (Refer Slide Time: 11:25)

And this is the notion which is part of Sapir Whorf hypothesis and it is weaker in the sense and this is known as linguistic relativism. So, in short it says our experience in the world, our world view depends on the language that we speak if we elaborate on this we come to the point that the way language works, the way the structure of language works, for the speakers of that language and such a thing becomes helpful in the structuring their thought patterns. And in a way, it feeds to the stronger version, what is known as linguistic determinism.

It was very famous at a time, but little later, people found arguments against both linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism. That is, both parts of Sapir Whorf hypothesis. We will look at

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Evidence

- Differences in structure correspond to different ways of perceiving the world.
- English sentences consist of two main parts, the subject and the predicate. The expression of any given situation is divided into an agent and an action. Some American Indian languages, for example, Hopi, doesn't make this subject-predicate division, i.e., a verb can exist or occur independent of a subject. In English we say *A light flashed*, while in Hopi the same meaning is expressed by one simple word *rehpi* (flash occurred).



some of these things and but before we look at the arguments, in terms of evidence that had been presented, to counter, Sapir Whorf hypothesis let's look at one or two examples in the basis of which Sapir Whorf reached this, the conclusion of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism. (Refer Slide Time: 13:01)

So differences in structure correspond to different ways of perceiving the world and to support that the example, that this hypothesis presents is the following. So there are two parts of English Sentences. One is the Subject and the Predicate. This is kind of principle that operates in linguistic theory, in understanding of the sentence. The idea in the modern time that is in particular Bose 1957 was that these two parts are significant for the construction of the sentence.

The expression of any given situation is divided into an agent and an action. So two parts of the sentence that is Subject and Predicate, two ways or two parts of this division into agent and action, is part of English. However, Hopi an American Indian language does not show this kind of distinction between subject and predicate, that is, a verb can exist independent of a subject.

In Hopi sentences, we do not need a subject. The argument that Whorf presents, that Hopi does not need a subject, and he goes into examples of. So, in English, we can say look at examples in the on the screen. 'A light flashed' so we need to say, a light and then flashed. However, in Hopi, same thing can be expressed with simple words which is given on the screen. And it means flash occurred.

This happens in many languages of the world, and this was presented as an example. then, in support of how English and American Indian languages differ from one another in terms of

the construction of their sentences and then Whorf concludes that this has implications for how English speakers perceive the world and how speakers of American Indian languages would perceive the world.

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- The action of flashing and the agent of light are combined together. What English speakers perceive is mainly an action while the Hopi perceives the state.
- English and Nootka are different for Whorf in the sense that a subject-predicate language in fact presents a bipolar worldview. Whereas a language with subject-predicate combined sentence pattern presents a holistic and synthetic worldview. This difference in worldview is not abstracted from the external world, but pre-conditioned by different languages. People speaking a certain language will have to follow the logic of this language in their thinking.



So see let's look at another example. So the action of flashing and the agent of light are combined together. What English speakers perceive is mainly the action while Hopi speakers perceives the state. Similarly English and Nootka are different for Whorf in the sense that a subject predicate language presents a bipolar worldview. That is, for the way English speakers would perceive the world is always going to be bipolar, whereas a language With subject predicate, combined pattern would present holistic world view would always have a holistic world view which is also known as synthetic world view. So this difference in the world view of bipolar and synthetic or holistic

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is not abstracted from external world but pre conditioned by the different languages, these, the people speak. So the point that Whorf is making is very simple, that the world view and the experience that people have, is determined by the structure of the language that they speak. And this is what he is trying to show with the example from English, Hopi and Nootka.

And he has presented that because English has the structure which follows subject, verb and predicate pattern and it follows agent and action pattern, but Nootka and Hopi would present the structure which is holistic, synthetic and in those languages, you do not really need a subject and therefore they have such a world view such experience of their lives.

A word of caution here one would still like to investigate whether or not American Indian languages really are without subjects. I am sure it has been investigated in great details and I invite you to take a look at and find it out. Because subjects and predicates are two essential patterns to part of principle essential patterns for construction of a sentence.

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Arguments against Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Lexical Units

- The relationship between the word and the meaning of a word is quite arbitrary. This is not fundamental to a conceptual system.
- When the speakers of one language have only one word for a specific concept such as 'snow', it does not mean that they are poorer in distinguishing between different kinds of snow.
- If this was not true, we will have issues in learning a different language.



Moving beyond there were some arguments which were given against this hypothesis. And there were very powerful arguments. So the basically these arguments need, that the structure of the language would not really shape up how we think or how we perceive the world. And the first example comes from lexical units, that is words, we know that the lessons between the word and what a word means.

Is quite arbitrary and this is not a fundamental to a conceptual system. The speaker of one language with only one word for a specific concept, let's take the example snow do not mean, this situation does not mean, that they are poorer in distinguishing between different kinds of snow. It's been argued that Eskimos have different types of snow.

And they have different words for snow, please take another caution here, that is have been contested, that It's not really true and people have not independently verified really Eskimos have too many words for snow. In fact, there are few but not as many as been claimed. So the point is not whether Eskimos have too many words for snow or not.

The point is if language A has got too many words for snow and language B has got only one word for snow, it is not fair for us to say that people with speakers of the language with fewer words for snow would not know how to distinguish between different types of snow. If this was not true, then we will have issues learning different languages.

However, we know that we learn different languages, sometimes pretty effortlessly and sometimes pretty well by putting some efforts on it and that's the whole discussion of second language acquisition which we have done earlier. In terms of a structure as well we find that the differences in the grammatical structure of language are not directly related to the differences in perpetual system of the speakers of these languages.

Language, structure and perpetual systems are not interdependent. Language differences are mainly differences in surface structures.

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Structure

- The differences in grammatical structures of languages are not directly related to the differences in the perceptual system of the speakers of these languages. Language structures and perceptual systems are not closely interdependent.
- Language differences are mainly differences in surface structures. For example, English indicates the third person singular number by adding the morphological element “-(e)s” to the end of a verb.



For example, English indicates the third person plural number by adding a morphological element to the end of a word. A similar thing is done by different morphing in different languages. But it is not true that the speakers of other languages would not understand how the singular number is indicated by a particular morphing in English

Simultaneously it also applies that English speakers do figure out how singular number or any other type of gender would be indicated in other languages. If we didn't know this, if we didn't know negotiating with these things, then we would not be learning the other language. So what we see on the basis of lexical item and structure is it's not really, it doesn't hold the ground, that, language structures are thought. I mean take more examples of the levels of words.

Sometimes we have talked about snow and we have talked about the situation where Language A has got one word and Language B has got more than one word. It's also possible that sometimes Language A has got one word and Language B has got no word for that. That thing or a concept still we understand concept if we are not the speaker of Language A take

for example duppata or rasagulla. For a speaker of Hindi, we understand these two words they aren't exact parallels of these two words in English.

But English speakers do understand that duppata is not really scarf, duppata is not really a long piece of cloth it has a specific purpose and it has a specific meaning, in its language, in the language, in the culture, and English speakers even with the absence of the term, understands the concept, and similarly it the same thing applies to the term rasagulla. Then languages are full of these examples and therefore it is easily point out that there are issues with open hypothesis that language determines our world view. So

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- Language is only the medium by which world views are expressed. The language system is not inherently related to world views.
- The speakers with the same native language do not necessarily possess the same world views, while the speakers of different languages may share the same world views.



What we see here is, language is only the medium by which world views are expressed. ofcourse world views by its, world views are expressed by through language and language system is not inherently but what is also true and what appears to be true language system is not inherently related to world views. It indicates world views but it is not related in a serious sense with how it works how the world view works.

The speakers with the same native language do not necessarily possess the same world view this is also true, speakers of the same language have got different world views, while the speakers of the different languages may share the same world views, this is also true and this sound pretty strong argument.

So far what we see as a conclusion, is undoubtedly the idea of the language, the terms and the notions represented by the term like Language, Society and Culture have got a very complex inter relationship between one another. But the argument that they are located in the structure of the language does not seem to be holding the ground. However it is also impossible

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In support of Sapir-Whorf

1. */? raajuu kalam caahtaa hai
Raju pen wants is
'Raju wants a pen.'

2. raajuu ko kalam caahiye
Raju to pen need
'Raju needs/wants a pen.'



To completely refute the strength of Sapir Whorf hypothesis. In some cases we do find some support in favour of Sapir Whorf hypothesis that is to say there are certain types of world views that are located in the structure of language. We will look at one example from Hindi rather two examples from Hindi, to see how Sapir Whorf hypothesis could be supported and really whether or not these examples work in support of Sapir Whorf hypothesis remains open for investigation. let's consider these two examples.

When someone says in Hindi, 'raaju kalam caahtaa hai' this sentence is perfectly grammatically normal sentence. However there are problems with acceptability of the sentence. Speakers of the language Hindi would reach the conclusion that it is a grammatical sentence, but categorically this is not an acceptable sentence.

We would need to investigate the difficulty and acceptability of the sentence. However when we say 'raaju ko kalam caahiye' we change the sentence. The two sentences mean almost the same thing then the sentence is acceptable. Now a brief note on the structure of the language, that in, sentence number one,

the sentence is called direct sentence. Meaning of direct is very simple. That the subject of the sentence, that is, 'raju' agrees with the verb in example number 2, the subject of this, logically should be the subject of the sentence. Raju does not seem to be in agreement with the verb, rather the verb does not indicate any agreement at all.

It's a very unique kind of a verb in Hindi 'chaahiye' I invite you to look at the formation of the word verb 'chaahiye' this is probably the only verb in Hindi which does not undergo any change. it doesn't take any inflexion on it and it does not conjugate with tense or aspects or anything.


It's neither the imperative form of the verb 'chahjna' so such a sentence is called integrated sentence and this is my generalisation, my conclusion and I want to put this very strongly even though it goes in support of Whorfian hypothesis in the following way that the fact that sentence number 1 is grammatical but not acceptable and we need to explain the unacceptability of the sentence this is pretty simple.

That the sentence literally means raju wants a pen and the speakers of Hindi would not want to express the desire, which is expressed by the term, want in the direct fashion. The direct sentence where the subject shows agreement with the verb would not be acceptable even though grammatically because it shows desire and the speakers of Hindi would not want to reflect, would not want to underline their desire directly.

What they do and the strategy that they are applying to resolve this, they would convert the desire into a requirement and would make the sentence the indirect where the subject logical subject would not be indicating any grammatic any agreement with the verb and then the sentence becomes perfectly both grammatical and acceptable. So this seems to be going in support of Whorfian hypothesis. Let us take one more

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Politeness

- (5) ghar aa-o
home come-imp
'Come home.' [informal]
- (6) ghar aa-iye
home come-imp
'Please come home.' [formal]
- 

example of politeness. When we tell someone in Hindi, come home, there are two different ways of saying this thing. One is ghar-aa-o and the other is ghar-aa-iye. the exact literal translation of these two types of sentences in English would be come home and please come home, and the distinction in English is given as informal.

Come home is informal and Please come home is formal. However if we look at this in the proper context, come home could be a pretty formal request as well, depending on who we are talking to, whereas please come home, that is, ghar-aa-iye may not necessarily be a

request, it could definitely be a very formal and a strong thing but does not necessarily have to be a request. I use my favourite example to understand the distinction between the two in the following sentence, that, the chief executive of the nation, when talks to his subordinates or in particular the commanders of police forces or armed forces, we are we are trying to contest chief of the executive, chief executive, chief of the armed forces and his subordinates the commanders, that's the context we are trying to create.

So no matter how polite he wants to be, in linguistic structure, and no matter how politely he says something, to his subordinates, like ghar-aa-iye that is the only option to interpret, that it, as an order, and that remains an order to the subordinate commanders. So what helps us understand is this structure and how such a structure is interpreted in a social contact.

So this example from politeness, go a step further, and shows the complex relationship between social contacts, linguistic structure and how it supports or does not support the Sapir Whorf hypothesis. In short, whether or not, language structure determines world view need means an open question for investigation.

But the fact that there is a complex relationship between Language, Society and Culture is pretty evident and the grammar of society the grammar of culture is deeply imbedded in the grammar of language and the processing and computation of all three, that is, the grammar of Language, Society and Culture work in a very complex way in human mind, are inseparable from one another, requires much more in deft investigation. Thank You.