



## Language, Culture and Worldviews by Twentieth-Century Anthropologists

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### Abstract

Twentieth century anthropologists, starting from the 40s-50s were more focused on language and culture. At the turn of the century, Humboldt hypothesized the unique design of each language, which encodes a distinctly distinct view of the world. This idea was further propagated by Edward Sapir, who argued that "the worlds in which different societies live are different worlds, distinct above the world." Given Humboldt's hypothesis and Edward Sapir's idea of language and culture, we will try to answer questions such as: Does the language of a people shape the way things are thought and perceived? Is the view of a people coded in its own language and structured by its own grammar unique? The way language is used to communicate in social situations is increasingly becoming the focus of theoretical interest. Thus the theory of transformational linguistics presupposes that the main function of language is that of reference, that is, to make statements about the world. The world is built and operates on cultural diversity and its being.

**Keywords:** language, culture, world, anthropologists

### 1. Introduction

Among the most famous anthropologists of the twentieth century, are Margaret Mead, Franz Boas and Edward Sapir. Mead was a student of Franz Boas.

- Boas is regarded as the "father of American anthropology."

He immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth century from Germany. He was greatly influenced by the adherence of his parents, especially his mother, to the ideals of the failed socialist revolution in Germany of 1848.

According to his daughter, religion did not play an active role in family life (Franziska Boas 1972). Regarding this in the Nation, Boas wrote:

*The background of my early thinking was a German house in which the ideals of the 1848 revolution were a living force. (Franz Boas 1938a).*

In a letter to his sister Tony, Boas would write:

*I am and I will remain, an unsuitable idealist - and for that you and I should thank our mother. (Franz Boas 1886: 79).*

His uncle, Abraham Jacobi, was imprisoned in Germany for his revolutionary activities; from where he immigrated to the United States embarking on an important career as a physician<sup>1</sup>. He offered tremendous help to his nephew, enabling him to be employed at the American Museum of Natural History of the United States after emigrating from Germany (Adler 1918;)

- Margaret Mead died in 1978, holding the position of the world's most famous anthropologist.

Indeed, it was through her work that many people learned about her anthropology and holistic vision of the human species. As an anthropologist, Mead was trained to think about the interconnectedness of all aspects of human life. For example Food production cannot be separated from ritual and belief, and politics cannot be separated from raising children or art. This holistic understanding of human adaptation allowed Mead to talk about a very wide range of issues. She affirmed the possibility of learning from other groups, above all by applying the knowledge she brought from the field to the issues of modern life. Thus, she insisted that human diversity is a resource, not a barrier, which all human beings have the capacity to learn and learn from one another. Her pleasure in learning from others was manifested in the way she was able to address the public with love and respect.

- Sapir, the son of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, was sent to the United States at the age of five.

As a graduate student at Columbia University, he fell under the influence of the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas. Sapir turned his attention to the rich possibilities of linguistic anthropology. For about six years he studied the languages of the Yana, Paiute, and other indigenous peoples in the western United States. Sapir suggested that people perceive the world primarily through language. He wrote many articles on the relationship between language and culture. Thus in 1931, he made a complete description of a linguistic structure and its function in speech, which could provide knowledge on the perceptual and cognitive abilities of people and help explain different behaviors between peoples of different cultural backgrounds. He also did considerable research in comparative and historical linguistics. Poet, essayist, composer, as well as an excellent scholar, Sapir wrote in a clear and comprehensible manner which gave him a considerable literary reputation. His publications included *Language* (1921), which was the most influential, and a collection of essays, *Selected Writings by Eduard Sapir Language, Culture, and Personality* (1949).

## 2. Language and Its Social Use

The ways in which language is used to communicate in social situations are increasingly becoming the focus of theoretical interest. The theory of transformational linguistics assumes that the main function of language is the referential one, which means that it allows you to make statements about the world, although it can be said that the "world" is left out.

Linguistic theory has dealt more with the relationship of sentences to each other than with finding the most appropriate ways of speaking.<sup>2</sup>

Linguists have constantly had to deal with the world to which the language refers. For this the indicators<sup>3</sup> present us with information only about situations in the real world. The moment such a question is asked; it becomes clear that language does not simply make statements about the world or raise questions about it - whatever they may be.

We use the act of speaking to fire, give directions, commands or instructions.<sup>4</sup> Keesing will express that magical utterances, curses and oaths can be thought of by speakers to make greater changes in the world or in relation to spirits. (Keesing 1979: 81 14-36)

It has been increasingly observed that sentences that are the same in meaning are not interchangeable or interchangeable,<sup>5</sup> but are sentences that fit very different contexts of social relations. In many languages, changes in the pronoun system are used to express formality or respect. There may be (let's put it bluntly, there are) different vertical dialects within a language, which may be appropriate for different classes and social levels, which speak to the inferior or superior status of the speaker, but not only that. . They also talk and show about different situations.

Particularly important are the dialectal patterns presented in non-western countries. Let's take two concrete examples.

To use the Javanese language in a particular situation, you have to choose one of three levels of speaking style: a)

<sup>1</sup> Jacob hospital in New York takes his name

<sup>2</sup> We would like to explain that it is referred to the sentences which have the same meaning, but different order as in the case of: Andy threw the ball = The ball was thrown by Andy.

<sup>3</sup> Lexicons like here, there, refer to points in space, while then and now, moments of time, thus referring to space and time

<sup>4</sup> As in the cases: I declare you a man and a woman! You can kiss the woman! Until the end of time!

<sup>5</sup> As in the cases: Would you please open the door? – Open that damn door!

the lowest, which is harsh and formal, as in the case of *Open that damn door!* B) The highest, that is more elegant and formal as in the case of *Would you please open the door?* C) medium - *Can you open the door?* (Keesing & Strathern, 2008: 41)

There are other ways to make a situation even lower or even higher, as in the case - *Would you have trouble opening the door, please!* Situations and ways of communication - reference which vary from one culture to another and from one language to another. So what patterns or levels a Javanese speaker chooses to use depends on his or her social status.

The choice, in fact, can / should be made by the interlocutor and their communication situation.

Wanting to further our discussion with a focus on language, culture and their intercultural perspective, we are bringing an example addressed by Geertz (1960: 249)

*Are you going to eat rice and cassava now?*<sup>6</sup>

It is completely transformed when it comes to different levels of Javanese language. Thus the same word for both levels - the lowest and the highest - is cassava.

Geertz, early in his career, criticized the scientific models widely used in the social sciences. He rejected the causal determinism that so often passed for explanation and instead embraced hermeneutics. He argued that culture consists of the meanings that people find to give meaning to their lives and to guide their actions. Interpretive social science is an attempt to incorporate those meanings.

Looking to bring water to the Geertz mill, we can say that when it comes to language or culture or, language and culture, we face a variety of code difficulties. Thus our theory of speaking Albanian differs greatly from the theory of speaking of others, although this is not something that is not known or expected. And in this context, codification or decoding can materialize in the handshake or the kisses that are given, even down to the number and the case of why they are given. To make this situation more comprehensible to us or let us say closer to us, linguists have proposed that this be resolved taking into account dialects and idioms, as separate versions of the linguistic characteristics of each.

Thus, to make the discussion more understandable we can say that the Albanian language is an abstract model of a language, an idealized standardization as well as a mixture of both as it includes special dictionaries for electricians, mechanics, physicists and so on.

Linguists have therefore found it necessary to consider the variety of codes when it has had to interpret different kinds of problems. Anthropologists, on the other hand, will pay attention to the dissemination of cultural models of reality within the communities they study.

### 3. Language as a Cultural Functions and not Biologically Inherited

Lecture / speaking are such a familiar feature of everyday life that we rarely stop to define it. Even that is, it feels as natural to man as walking or breathing.

However, it only takes a moment of reflection to convince us that this naturalness of speech is nothing but a disappointing, false feeling.

The process of mastering speech is, in fact, something completely different from that process of learning to walk. In the case of the latter function, culture, in other words, the traditional body of social use, is not seriously brought into play because the child is individually endowed with the complex set of factors we call biological inheritance such as the necessary muscular and nervous adjustments that lead the child to walking.

Indeed, the adaptation of the muscles and the corresponding parts of the nerve of the system can be said to have been adapted mainly to the movements made while walking and within similar activities. In a very real sense, the normal human being is destined to walk, not because most adults will help him to learn this ability, but because his body is prepared from birth, or even from the moment of conception, to take on all those nerve energy expenditures and all those

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<sup>6</sup> Are: *apa/ napa/ menapa*  
you: *kowé/ sampéjan/pandjenengan*  
going: *arep/adjeng/badé*  
to eat: *mangan/neda/dahar*  
rice: *sega/sekul*  
and: *lan/kali jan*  
cassava: *kaspé*  
now : *saiki/ san ikil samen ika*

muscle adjustments that result in walking. In short, walking is a natural biological function of man.

As with language, this does not happen. Of course it is true that in a sense the individual is predestined to speak, but this is entirely due to the circumstances that he was not born simply in nature, but in the lap of a society that is secure, reasonably, sure to guide her to her traditions.

Sapir in *Language, an introduction of the study of speech* (1921: 5) underlines the fact of the existence of society and has every reason to believe that it (society) will teach the child to walk if, indeed, he survives.<sup>7</sup> But it is just as certain that he will never learn to speak, that is, to communicate ideas according to the traditional system of a certain society, in the way he learned to walk. Or, try to move the newborn out of society the environment in which he has come to a completely foreign environment. He will develop the art of walking in his new environment in the same way he would have developed it in the old environment.

But his speech will be completely at odds with the speech of his native environment. Walking, then, is a general human activity that changes only within limited limits as we move from individual to individual. Its variability is involuntary and unintentional. Speaking is a human activity that changes when we pass from one social group to another, because it includes the historical heritage of the group, the product of continuous social use. It changes like the whole creative endeavor - not so consciously, perhaps, but no less than the religions, beliefs, customs and arts of different peoples. Walking is an organic function, instinctive speech is non-instinctive, and it is an acquired, "cultural" function.

Human culture depends largely on the human capacity to create languages, so structuralism anthropologists have argued that cultural meanings are composed within contrasts. This does not mean that all forms of classification should be taxonomic, as there may be common cross-cultural patterns that transcend these common taxonomies. Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956: 240) has argued that languages structure views on the world. Language, Whorf notes, (1956: vi) is the best display man makes. Other creatures have developed similar communication systems, but not real languages.

On the other hand George Philip Lakoff and Mark Johnson in the 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By* have emphasized the importance of metaphors in expressing experience. They emphasize that we should compare linguistic communication with non-linguistic communication. We must remember that cultural and linguistic knowledge are distributed in a distributive manner and that changes in codes need to be considered within the broadest limits. The book suggests that metaphor is a tool that enables people to use what they know about their direct physical and social experiences to understand more abstract things like work, time, and mental activity and feelings.

Lakoff and Johnson, however, confess that ideas about the relationship between metaphor and the ritual of speech have "flowed" from the anthropological tradition of Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz and others. (1980: xi- xii). In the introduction to the first chapter, they will point out that metaphor for most people is a tool of poetic imagination and a kind of rhetorical "flourishing" - a matter of the extraordinary, more than part of ordinary language. Metaphor, however, is typically seen as characteristic of language itself, a matter of words rather than a matter of judgment or action. For this reason, many people think that they can do it perfectly without it (without metaphor). We - Lakoff and Johnson go on - have found that on the contrary, that metaphor has penetrated into everyday life, not only in language but also in judgments and actions. Our ordinary conceptual system, in the sense that we all think and act, is deeply in its metaphorical nature. (1980: 3).

So, following this stream of discussion, we can say that there is a fact that has often attempted to hinder the recognition of language as a purely conventional system of vowel symbols, which has enticed the minds of the majority by attributing to them instinctive bases it does not really possess. But on the other hand there is a difference between the involuntary feeling and the normal type of communication of ideas that are spoken, which most of the time, is built and functions on metaphors. Speech / language as we mentioned above is really instinctive, but also non-symbolic at the same time.

In other words, the sound of pain or the sound of joy, as such, does not show emotion, does not stand aside, as it were, and declares that some emotion is being felt, expressed or not metaphorically.

So following the discussions from the given data of the most important voices of cultural anthropology give us to think that language distinguishes humans from all other creatures. Every known human society has had a language and although some nonhumans may be able to communicate with each other in quite complex ways, none of their communication systems begin to approach language in its ability to convey information. Nor is the transmission of complex and varied information an integral part of the daily life of other creatures. Nor do other communication systems share many of the design features of human language, such as the ability to communicate about different events from here and now. But it is difficult to conceive of a human society without language.

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<sup>7</sup> As we mentioned above Sapir made his study in the non-developed societies where the death children rate it was high.

Language, like culture, that other most human attribute, is noted for its unity in diversity: there are many languages and many cultures, all different, but all essentially the same, because there is a human nature and because a feature fundamental of this human nature. is the way in which it allows such diversity both in language and in culture. It is impossible to separate language from literature, or politics, or most of our daily human interactions and even more so from ethnic culture.

In this article, however, the discussion focuses not only on the linguistic structure but also on how it is used in human society. Therefore, language is treated almost exclusively from the point of view of linguistics and the article focuses on what we have learned about language and culture, language in culture over the last two centuries. Linguists study individual human languages and linguistic behavior in order to discover the basic properties of this general human language within a given cultural context. Through this venture, they also hope to discover some basic aspects of what it means to be human. The importance of language and languages goes beyond the internal structure, extending to almost all human endeavors.

#### 4. Conclusions

The most influential anthropologists of the twentieth century put forward their hypotheses on the configuration of language as a very important cultural enterprise, which can be learned only within its cultural circle.

Sapir, as an honor to the best representative of this relationship defends the thesis that language is not learned instinctively, as can happen with the walker, but within its cultural environment. It is within this environment that the way of communication is born, which according to Lakoff and Johnson is called a metaphorical language which feels and shows the nuances of the development of culture. Following the same line of logic Whorf will take the discussion to another point considering languages as structuring on views of the world.

Each of the anthropologists, whether Boas, Mead, Malinowski, Strauss or Turner, Geertz or Sapir, emphasizes language as an expression of culture and culture as its food, emphasizing the fact that the language of a people shapes the way of thinking and perceiving things

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