Language and Communication

Chapter 4 Themes

- Symbols
- Language and speech
- Elements of language
  - Phonology
  - Grammar
  - Semantics
  - Sociolinguistics
- Manipulating meaning

Kwame Nkrumah's house in Nkroful, Ghana

Language and Speech

- **Language** is a system of cultural knowledge used to generate and interpret speech.
- **Speech** refers to the behavior that produces vocal symbols and is generated by language.

Non-human Primate Communication

Primatology research has shed new light on non-human primate language abilities.....

- Nim Chimpsky and Washoe - chimpanzee ASL studies

- Koko the Gorilla - understands 1,000 ASL signs, 2,000 spoken words in English

- Kanzi the Bonobo - understands thousands of human words and uses thousands of lexigram symbols to communicate
- Do apes have a "theory of mind"?
- Kanzi's 1st Phone Call

The Origins of Language

The origins of spoken language are unknown.

❖ Creole Languages

❖ Children's Acquisition of Language

All language is symbolic

- Words are symbols
- Gestures are symbols
- Non-verbal communication is symbolic

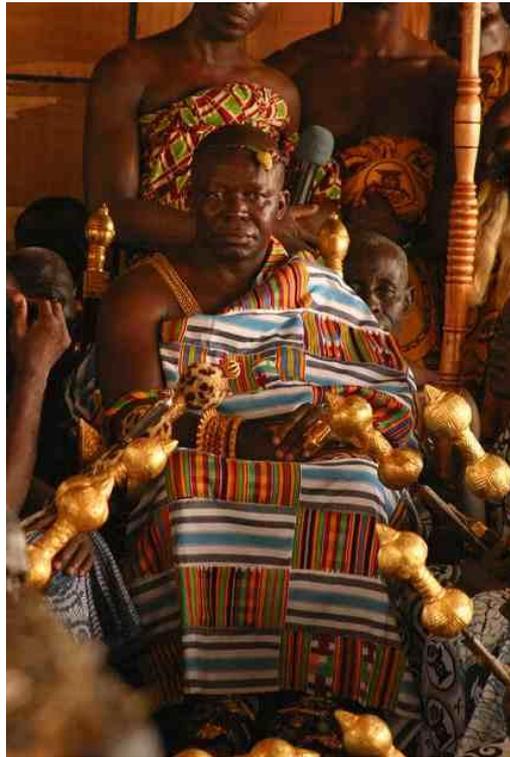Examples of non-verbal symbolic communication

Kente cloth among the Akan and Ewe in Ghana

Asantehene Osei Tutu II wearing kente cloth, 2005 (photo: Retlaw Snellac, CC BY 2.0)

Togbui Afede, Paramount Chief of the Ho-Asgoli Traditional area

Atumban or "talking drums" in Ghana

- Every step in the process of making a drum is infused with spiritual and ecological considerations
- Drums used to communicate during war, to praise the king, to tell the history of a people; used in funerals, puberty rites, shrines
- Drums also gave the Asante an advantage in war, as the drum can be manipulated to sound like a lion roaring!

Nonverbal Communication: A particular nonverbal action conveys a message only because of conventions or common understandings. **Like speech, most forms of nonverbal communication are symbolic.**

- Kinesics - study of gestures, body language and comportment
- Proxemics - study of social space and communication in social contexts
- Paralanguage: characteristics of speech beyond the spoken word

Paralanguage and Kinesics in a West African context

In "Shade Compositions" (2005-present), a series of live performances and videos, the African-American artist Rashaad Newsome explores issues of Black authorship, appropriation, identity and belonging by conducting choirs of women (and sometimes, gay men) of colour who snap their fingers, smack their lips, roll their eyes, and cock their heads, creating expressive linguistic symphonies out of the nonverbal gestures and vocalizations of African-American women.
https://vimeo.com/265835509

https://www.instagram.com/reel/ChaU4-8oylj/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet

Elements of Language

- **Phonology** consists of the categories and rules for forming vocal symbols.

- *Phonemes* are a basic element of phonology—the minimal category of speech sounds that serve to keep utterances apart.

  Example: The English sounds /t/, /d/, and /s/ are phonemes.

Elements of Language

- ***Phonological rules*** state the order in which phonemes can occur.

  Examples: The English phoneme /ng/ (as in goi<u>ng</u>) never begins a word. Consonants and vowels tend to alternate in English. Some sequences of consonants, such as /mktb/ are excluded in English.

- Tone Languages: <u>Twi/Akan, for example</u>
- <u>Important phrases in Twi</u>

Linguistic Diversity in Ghana

Ghana has 11 official languages **but at least 68 different languages and dialects are spoken in the country**

Image source: Gladys Ansah, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-language-map-of-Ghana-Ethnologue-2013_fig3_283641288

1 Western Sisaala
2 Southern Dagaare
3 Paasaal (2)
4 Konni
5 Tumulung Sisaala
6 Kasem
7 Kantosi
8 Buli
9 Mampruli
10 Tampulma (2)
11 Farefare
12 Kusaal
13 Bisa
14 Bimoba
15 Anufo
16 Konkomba (2)
17 Ntcham
18 Dagbani
19 Gonja (5)
20 Hanga (2)
21 Chakali
22 Wali
23 Southern Birifor
24 Vagla
25 Kamara
26 Safaliba
27 Deg (2)
28 Ligbi
29 Nafaanra
30 Bondoukou Kulango
31 Abron
32 Dwang
33 Kplang
34 Chumburung (2)
35 Nawuri
36 Chala (2)
37 Krache
38 Gikyode
39 Adele
40 Delo
41 Animere
42 Akposo
43 Lelemi
44 Siwu
45 Sekpele
46 Selee
47 Logba
48 Avatime
49 Tafi
50 Adangbe
51 Éwé
52 Gua
53 Nyangbo
54 Nkonya
55 Tuwuli
56 Nkami
57 Akan (4)
58 Sehwi
59 Anyin
60 Wasa
61 Nzema
62 Jwira-Pepesa
63 Ahanta
64 Awutu
65 Ga
66 Larteh
67 Dangme (2)
68 Cherepon

WIDESPREAD LANGUAGES
Akan
Éwé
Ghanaian Pidgin English
Ghanaian Sign Language
Hausa
Maasina Fulfulde

Language Families
Gur
Mande
Kwa

Notes:
1. White areas are sparsely populated or uninhabited.
2. Brackets show the number of times a language's number appears on map, if more than once.

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Elements of Language

- **Grammar** refers to the categories and rules for combining vocal symbols.

- *Morphemes* are basic grammatical elements. They consist of vocal symbols that form the minimal units of meaning in any language

  Example: The word /bats/ is two morphemes, /bat/ and plural /s/.

- *Grammatical rules* govern linguistic performance.

Elements of Language

- **Semantics** refers to the categories and rules for relating vocal symbols to their referents.

- **Sociolinguistic rules** combine meaningful utterances with social situations into appropriate messages.

- **Focal vocabularies** are sets of words that pertain to important aspects of the culture (e.g. Saami herders of Scandinavia)

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- The idea that language influences the perceptions and thought patterns of those who speak it, and thus conditions their worldview.

- Language does so by providing labels for certain kinds of phenomena (things, concepts, qualities, and actions), which different languages define according to different criteria.

- Also known as "linguistic determinism".
- Linguist Daniel Everett's work among the Piraha

Gugu Yimithirr of Australia

The English language ias "egocentric" vs Guugu Yimithirr, which uses cardinal directions for orientation

Sociolinguistics: study of how speech behavior is affected by social context

Ghanaian use of parables and proverbs

Photo by Robert Anasch on Unsplash

Many parables about Anansi the spider (trickster god)

Proverbs as told by "tata" Nkuma Achua

"Even the dead would like to increase their numbers"

proverb reflecting the desires of expansionism

"Don't go fiddling under the eye of a dead body or you will see maggots" – When meeting someone don't immediately ask where they are from/don't dig into ethnic history

"When you are born on an anthill, it doesn't take long for you to be tall" You have a head start relative to others

Sociolinguistics- areas of interest

- **Cultural knowledge** includes knowing how to alter one's total (including verbal) behavior to fit these situations.
- **Social Roles** are reflected in speech patterns: honorifics and gendered speech, as examples
- **Code-Switching:** using more than one language/dialect in the context of a single conversation.
- **Pidgin** and **Creole** languages – reflect history of globalization, colonization, and resistance to forced assimilation

Pidgin languages:

develop from contact between speakers of two different languages, in this case British English and the various Ghanaian languages (e.g. Ga, Twi, Ewe, etc)

Image credit: Daniel Neilson, Guide to Ghanaian slang and dialect
Street art from Chalewotey festival in the Jamestown part of Accra, Ghana

Gendered Speech: patterned ways in which language practices (verbal and non-verbal) reflect normative gender expectations and the statuses assigned to the genders.

Reflect upon the ways in which our gender norms and values are revealed in speech patterns and nonverbal communication.

Some articles to consider:

Who Speaks More in Movies, Men or Women?

UN Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language in English

Kamala Harris Reminding Mike Pence "I'm Speaking" is Every Woman in a Meeting

1) Discrepancy in speaking time and frequency of female characters in film
2) Emphasized femininity: how and why is femininity emphasized in our language (while masculinity is the norm)?
3) Gender differences in proxemics (use of social space) and Kinesics (body language)
4) Gendered "slang" terms and derogatory names
5) Gender status reflected in discourse: e.g. "you throw like a girl" or "don't be a pussy"
6) When from a position of power, are messages received differently based on the gender of the speaker?
7) How does our language uphold the heteronormative gender binary?

Example: the form and variation in greeting patterns among Twi speakers in Ghana reflect both the **gender** and the **status** of the interlocutors

Greetings enact a dialogue shaped by gender and age and are imbued with cultural nuances

Speaker 1: "Maakye" (good morning)

Speaker 2: a) Response to an older man: "ye adga"
b) Response to an older woman: "ye Ena"
c) Response to a younger woman "ye enua"

Speaker 1: "Wo ho te sEn (Ete sen)?" (how are you?)

Speaker 2: "Me ho ye" (I am fine) "Na woonsoye" (and how are you?)

Speaker 1: "Bibi ya te sEn" (Everything is good!) or "Me nso me ho ye" (I'm also fine")

Speaker 2: 'yoooo' (ok I hear you)

Speaker 1: "yEbEhyia!" (see you later!) or "yoooo"

Manipulating Meaning

- **Metaphor** is a comparison, usually linguistic, that suggests how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in another.

  Example: The phrase *tax burden* links the payment of taxes to carrying a heavy load.

  Other Examples?

Discourse and the Power of Language

● Those who control content of messages control the information available to other people.

● Language is **an instrument of power** used to persuade and influence

● **Language reflects inequality and status in our society**: e.g. White Mainstream English versus Black Language Practice (AAVE)

English Language Curriculum and Black Language

Black Language: A style of speaking English words with Black Flava - with Africanized semantic, grammatical, pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns. Black Language comes out of the experience of U.S. slave descendants. This shared experience has resulted in common language practices in the Black community. The roots of African American speech lie in the counter language, the resistance discourse, that was created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class (Smitherman, 2006)

White Mainstream English: emphasizes how standard English gets racialized as white and legitimizes white, male, upper middle-class, mainstream ways of speaking English (Alim & Smitherman, 2012)

Black language speakers are expected to code-switch to conform to WME

Black Language Structure and Syntax

SYNTAX	SEMANTICS	PRONUNCIATION	RHETORICAL FEATURES
Habitual Be — We be at Rouge Park hoopin' on Saturdays.	**Words & Idioms** — Ashy, Saddity, Triflin, Fake it til' you make it, Tryin' to make a dollaout of fifteen cent.	**Consonants** — Aks or Axe (ask)	**Signifyin** — Do it look like money grow on trees?
Regularized Agreement — We was at Lisa's house last night. He have to be at work in the morning.		**Final Consonant Clusters** — Han (hand), Tes (test)	**Derrick**: "I be kickin' it with all the girls in seventh hour." **Sean**: "Yeah right! The only thing that be kickin' in seventh hour is yo breath."
Zero Copula — You right about that.	**Slang** — Swag, Keep it 100, Mood, Fleek, Issa Vibe, Drip, Goals	**Sounds** — Dey (They), Dese (These), Dem (Them), Wit or Wif (With), Smoov (Smooth), Baf (Bath)	**Signifyin** — Her outfit is baddd!
Multiple Negation — I ain't got no friends at that school.			Nah, that's my nigga right there.
Don — It's too late. He done already paid for the trip.			
BIN — We been done with our project.			
Optional Possessive 'S — I'm going to my father house for the summer.			

Source: Black Linguistic Justice (May 2020) by April Baker-Bell

Black Language Practice

Jamila Lyiscott "3 Ways to Speak English" (2014)

Now you may think that's too hood, that's not cool

What important sociolinguistic concepts are reflected in Lyiscott's performance?