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 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

The History and Significance of Kente Cloth

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
- Proxemetics - 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/ChaU4-8oyIj/?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 going) 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: [Twi/Akan, for example](#)
- [Important phrases in Twi](#)
Linguistic Diversity in Ghana

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

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 is "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

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

Photo by Robert Anasch on Unsplash
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](https://example.com)
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).
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntax</th>
<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Rhetorical Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Habitual Be</strong></td>
<td>Ashy</td>
<td>Aks or Axe (ask)</td>
<td>Signifyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saddity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triflin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fake it til’ you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>make it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tryin’ to make a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dollaout of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fifteen cent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regularized Agreement</strong></td>
<td>Fake it til’ you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>make it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tryin’ to make a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dollaout of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fifteen cent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zero Copula</strong></td>
<td>You right about that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Negation</strong></td>
<td>I ain’t got no friends at that school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ronin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s too late. He done already paid for the trip.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We been done with our project.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optional Possessive ‘S’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m going to my father house for the summer.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Signifyin**

Do it look like money grow on trees?

**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.”

**Signifyin**

Her outfit is badd:

Nah, that’s my nigga right there.
Now you may think that’s too hood, that’s not cool
What important sociolinguistic concepts are reflected in Lyiscott’s performance?